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**Adapting *A Man of the People* to Stage:
Can Stage Adaptation Successfully Return Igbo
Literary Fiction to the Igbo People?**

Chikwendu PK Anyanwu

*A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of PhD degree in Creative Writing.*

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Chikwendu Anyanwu

Abstract

With the death of the folk storytelling tradition in Igbo society, the hope of passing Igbo stories to future generations seems to lie with the novel and dramatic theatre. Unfortunately, in the past two to three decades, both the reading culture and theatre practice in Igbo land have seriously declined. The political situation, the economy, the non-practical approach to problem solving by the literary and cultural intellectuals, the ceaseless streaming of popular and trash cultures from the West through television into Igbo towns and villages, the rise of home movies with pseudo-vooodoo stories, have all contributed to the demise of honest and purposeful storytelling in Igbo society.

Confronted by a society on the threshold of losing its identity, I thought of a practical step I could take to address the situation through the dramatic adaptation of one Igbo novel, Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*. Adapting the novel to stage offered me two opportunities in one: to contribute not only towards the revival of literary appreciation, but also of theatre practice, which, as anthropologists like Victor Turner, have argued, belongs to popular culture. This task involved rewriting the novel into a drama script, producing it on stage in Igbo land and observing how it impacted on the audience and community.

I chose to adapt *A Man of the People* because of its relevance to my understanding of the socio-political atmosphere in Igbo land and in Nigeria as a whole. In order to understand the context, and complete my adaptation, I examined and analysed the history of the Igbo people, culture and literature, the political atmosphere in Nigeria and the nature of African drama. Adaptations, according to Linda Hutcheon, are not simply repetitions. They rather "affirm and reinforce basic cultural assumptions" (Hutcheon 2006: 176) while re-creating and re-interpreting an earlier story in the light of new realities.

Ours is a society in need of its earlier stories for its continued existence as a people, and as a nation with shared values. My conclusion is that adaptation and dramatisation can have an important role to play in reviving and then, in maintaining the Igbo culture and improving literary appreciation among the people.

INTRODUCTION

In February 2007, as part of this PhD programme, I produced my adaptation of Chinua Achebe's novel, *A Man of the People*. This took place at Owerri, the capital city of Imo State in Nigeria, a place popularly called the 'Igbo Heartland' because of its geographical position in the Southeast of Nigeria. Significantly, Owerri, in the past two to three decades has played the role of Igbo cultural centre where Ahajioku (*New Yam Festival*) Lectures as well as the Odenigbo Lectures¹ are held annually. The production of my adaptation had two performances inside a full auditorium at Alvan Ikoku College of Education and both of which excited the audiences. The production was a key element in my PhD investigation into the adaptation of Igbo novels for the stage.

In Igbo and Nigerian society, one can say that dramatising the novels has not been given proper attention. After the Nigerian Television Authority's (NTA) film production of *Things Fall Apart* (1986), one would have thought that more novels would have been dramatised either through film or stage. That has not been the case, even with the recent home video (Nigeria Films) boom.

In adapting an Igbo novel to stage, I am asking a number of questions regarding literacy, theatre and storytelling in our society. First, can theatre be an effective media for the diffusion of the novel stories in our society? Second, can stage adaptation of Igbo novels stimulate, revive and sustain reading habits among the Igbo as far as the novels are concerned? Third, I am also asking: can adaptations provide new life to stage and theatre in Igbo land, which, from my perspective, is comatose? Four, can adaptation help to recover the story telling tradition, even if it is modified into a rehearsed performance, such as drama?

These questions have become very pertinent for me to ask considering that the Igbo nation has produced several of Africa's greatest novelists such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprain Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi, Flora Nwapa, John Munonye, Onuora Nzekwu, Buchi

¹ Odenigbo is a two-day celebration instituted by the Catholic Archdiocese of Owerri in 1996 to revive public interest in the use of Igbo language. It comprises of an evening of cultural performances and lectures in the Igbo language the following day by eminent Igbo scholars. Odenigbo was basically established to provide what was considered lacking in Ahajioku Lectures which was delivered in Academic English.

Emecheta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and many more. However, in the last two to three decades, I argue that these authors and their stories have not been as widely diffused and highly appreciated in their own society as they should be. While my PhD research is not an endeavour to produce a barometer that tests the level of readership, it shows concern that the impacts of the novels are not being felt in our society. Critics like Eustace Palmer² or Catherine Acholonu³ could argue that the novels have not impacted on our society because they adopt western patterns of storytelling. Yet, the situation with our own oral pattern of folk storytelling, set in the moonlight, is dire. In February 2008, for instance, I gathered a group of children (5 – 14years) in my rural village of Egbelu Umuowa in Ngor-Okpala Local Government Area and asked of them folk stories, folk songs and moonlight games. To my greatest dismay, I discovered that what they knew was next to nothing in all the three categories of moonlight performances. Normally, Igbo children within this age bracket possessed an extensive repertoire of folk stories and songs as well as moonlight games. Unfortunately, the evidence on the ground showed that our folk stories and other cultural forms of entertainment were deserting our society. Igbo stories in the 21st century, we also need to acknowledge, are not only oral folk stories; they include the written stories – the novel, which in my estimation is experiencing low readership in our society.

Despite the fact that there is need to boost the reading culture, I also find the novel stories “social dramas”⁴ in themselves, in need of dramatisations. A social drama, which “occurs on all levels of social organisation from state to family”, according to Victor Turner, “is initiated when a peaceful tenor of regular, norm-governed social life is interrupted by the breach of a rule controlling one of its salient relationship”.⁵ These novels like Achebe’s novels are fictional versions of colonial disruptions of Igbo normative life by European interference. One of the results of that interference, as dramatised in *A Man of the People*, is the shifting of power from the community to a few individuals, thereby instituting a system that nurtures corruption. European interference, which also involved proselytization by the Christian missionaries, affected

² Palmer, E, *Growth of the African Novel*, London, Heinemann, 1979, p.5

³ Acholonu C, “Review: E. N. Emenyonu, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*”, in Eldred D. Jones (ed), *African Literature Today: Recent Trends in the Novel*, London, Heinemann, 1983

⁴ Turner, V, *From Ritual to Theatre*, New York, Paj Publications, 1982, p.92

⁵ Ibid.

the Igbo ritual theatre such that masquerade performances, where they still exist in Igbo land today, are mainly seen as mere entertainments.

In pre-colonial times, the Igbo had different forms of entertainments. These included storytelling, music – song and dance, masquerade theatre and traditional games. These forms of entertainment were also educational and the masquerade theatre was also ritual theatre.

The folk stories sought to address issues and answer questions about life. According to Uzodimma Nwala, Igbo folk stories

range from explanation of the origin of the world, man, animals, water etc., to explanation of why certain things are what and how they are (for example there are folkstories to explain why the sky and the earth are separated, why God went to live on high, why there is death in the world, etc).⁶

The folktales could be described as the exciting pathway into Igbo life. They provide entertainment and relaxation for people after the day's work. With different stories, and mostly with the tortoise as the hero, young people are taught to understand the basic Igbo principle which upholds the primacy of the community: 'no matter how wise or great, one cannot be wiser or greater than one's community.' This forms the basic ideology that generates Achebe's tragic characters. He uses the story of the tortoise and the birds in *Things Fall Apart* (pp. 68 -70) as a metaphor for the relationship between Okonkwo and Umuofia. When Ezeulu fails in *Arrow of God*, Achebe ends the novel like a folk story narrator: "...no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgment against his clan".⁷ This is an Igbo article of faith which Achebe professes so much that in *A Man of the People*, when the people's will is subdued, he introduces another force⁸ – the military – for Nanga's tragic end.

Generally, Igbo folktales are as much didactic as they are entertaining, structured with beginnings, conflicts and resolutions. Every narrator, Ernest Emenyonu indicates, "was for his audience, the educator, entertainer, philosopher, and counsellor. He entertained

⁶ Nwala, T. U, *Igbo Philosophy*, Lagos, Latern Books, 1985, p.72

⁷ Achebe, *Arrow of God*, Oxford, Heineman, 1964 (revised 1974) , p.230

⁸ Lindfors, B (ed), *Conversations with Chinua Achebe*, Jackson, Uni Press of Mississippi, 1997, p.22

as he instructed and endeavoured to make the values and beliefs portrayed in the tales come alive”.⁹ The stories are repeated to different generations but adapted to suit the perceived changes in every age and place.

There is also Igbo folk music, which, according to Meki Nzewi, is “a rationalized artistic-aesthetic phenomenon.”¹⁰ Like the music of many other cultures, Igbo folk music comprises songs and dances. Many of the folk songs follow the same artistic intentions of Igbo society – to express society’s experiences and emotions as well as teach valuable lessons. There are other folk songs that are there for entertainment purposes only. While some of the folk songs accompany dances and folktales to raise their aesthetic qualities and accentuate their didactic imports, some folk songs exclusively narrate their own stories. A song like *Uri Oma*, (Sweet Music/Song) has no folktale attached to it but is a ballad that laments the declining Igbo communal solidarity, acts of betrayal and cultural decay in the face of European culture. Like the *Uri Oma*, many Igbo folk songs, as Emenyonu observed, are filled with figurative speech and imagery that require deeper reflection for the meanings to emerge.¹¹ Some of the folk songs like *Onye ga-agba Egwu?* (Who is going to Dance?) go with dancing for a heightened entertainment.

Dance, according to Ossie Enekwe, is the dominant form of Igbo indigenous theatre.¹² For G. T. Basden, “Dancing, in one form or another, is by far the most popular and widely practised of all recreations among the Ibos (*sic*)”.¹³ Across Igbo land, people develop dances according to their life styles and/or history or as Basden put it, “The dances vary in character according to the fashions of different towns”.¹⁴ Basden observed that there were two types of dances – the free and open dances and the specialised dances. The first types are dances people were born with, which they begin to respond to within the first year of their lives and never lose grip of even in old age. These dances are normally connected with festivals and when they are performed “All

⁹ Emenyonu, E N, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, Ibadan, Oxford Uni Press, 1978, p.2

¹⁰ Nzewi, M, “Fundamentals of Igbo Musical Culture (Some Structural and Social Referents),” in Ofomata, GEK (ed), *A Survey of the Igbo Nation*, Onitsha, 2002, p.367

¹¹ Emenyonu, E N, *Ibid*, p.6

¹² Enekwe, O O, “Igbo Drama and Theatre” in Afigbo, A E (ed), *Groundwork of Igbo History*, Lagos, Vista Books, 1992, p.747

¹³ Basden, G.T., *Niger Ibos*, London, FrankCass & Co. Ltd, 1966, p.343

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p.344

are permitted to share in them....”¹⁵ The specialised dances are performed by trained troupes and these are more difficult to perform with rigorous preparations. Be it open or specialized dance, audience participation is a major feature of Igbo dances and they are good examples of what David Kerr refers to as the “participatory quality of indigenous African theatre”.¹⁶ For the Igbo, life and dance are interwoven and ‘dance’ is normally employed as metaphor for ‘life’. The sudden swerve movements in Abigbo (Mbaise) men’s dance, for instance, can be interpreted to mean that life can be dramatic and not so straight forward. Every occasion among the Igbo, from birth to death, has a dance commensurate to it. This is what I encapsulated in my poem, “Invitation” when I wrote: “...Blossoming, we dance in the morning to keep the sun shining; Decaying, we dance at night, to bring back the light....”¹⁷ Dancing for the Igbo is not just an expression of joy but it is also therapeutic both for individuals and for communities.

Even though dance is arguably the dominant feature of Igbo indigenous theatre, when we speak of Igbo traditional theatre, our thoughts are directed to the masquerade theatre. The masquerade is a theatrical art which combines other artistic and theatrical art forms. In Achebe’s words, “If the masquerade were not limited to the male sex alone, one might indeed call it the art form par excellence for it subsumes not only the dance but other forms – sculpture, music, painting, drama, costumery, even architecture....”¹⁸ In most cases, the costuming of the masquerade is very elaborate and colourful, making their appearance beautiful and at the same time, frightening. Victor Ukaegbu observes that there are cases when the costuming involves a uniform for both performers and participants¹⁹, which shows that the masquerade theatre is social and communal.

Masquerade theatre in pre-colonial period was also ritual theatre because the masquerade was then a socio-religious institution and phenomenon among the Igbo. They represented the spirits of dead ancestors who have come to participate in the life of the living and entertain them. According to Osita Okagbue

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kerr, D, *African Popular Theatre*, Oxford, James Currey, 1995, p.2.

¹⁷ Anyanwu, C P K, *I Dance Ala-Igbo*, London, Veritas Lumen Publishers, 2000, p.1

¹⁸ Achebe, C, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” in *Hopes and Impediments*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1988, p.44

¹⁹ Ukaegbu, V, *The use of Masks in Igbo Theatre in Nigeria: The Aesthetic Flexibility of Performance Traditions*, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007, pp.197-199

Conceptually, Igbo masquerade characters are ancestors or spirit forces that have taken on material form and returned to the human plane at the invitation of the living. Masking is thus a highly developed socio-religious activity whose sustaining ethos is that it enables the Igbo to establish a physical relationship and communion with the spirit world of their ancestors and deities. The ancestors and spirits constitute a community of souls and entities whose beneficial contact is constantly needed and sought by the living.²⁰

The terms, mask and masquerade, masking and masquerading are sometimes used synonymously and other times concomitantly. In Igbo theatre, they refer to the integration of differing art forms of dance, music and plastic arts such as the carved head-piece and the supporting props and costumes that embody the concept and practice of masking in a locality. Within this context, mask refers more appropriately to the carved mask-head which covers the face of the performer and masquerade refers to the total or partial concealment of performers with costumes including the mask head worn by the performer. Thus, masking and masquerading describe the practice of the theatre, and also, describe the process of costuming and the journey from performer and dramatic persona to the *otherworldly* essence. When a performer puts on the mask head or wears the whole masquerade costume or outfit, he is referred to as *mmanwu* or *mmuo* (spirit) because we are no longer talking about a human being but a spirit appearing in human form to entertain the living, settle a dispute or take part in a ritual. In this sense, *mmanwu* is used both for mask or masquerade as well as for the *spirit/s* walking about in human form.

The *mmanwu* performance is always a group activity and those who take part in the performances normally try to organise themselves into secret cults to mystify the process and create physical/psychological barriers from the rest of the community. Towns and villages had their own *mmanwu* groups that performed during festivals. In the pre-colonial era, they always performed during the *Ahajioku* or *Iri ji* (New Yam festival), which marked the ending of each year and the beginning of another. The performers always interact with the audience in different ways: without written scripts as in western drama, they can dialogue with the audience or cause audiences to

²⁰ Okagbue, O, *African Theatres and Performances*, London, Routledge, 200, p.19

reshuffle by charging at them aggressively. The masquerade theatre is characterized by motion which, according to Achebe, is at the heart of Igbo world view.²¹

Games are another form of entertainment and relaxation in Igbo land. There are numerous games which the scope of this work is not able to contain. A few of them include hunting, swimming, wrestling, hide and seek and many others that are played in the daylight and under the moon. They are communal and participatory like the dance art forms. Through them, the young people grow up learning a great deal about themselves and their world. The games are agents through which the Igbo build a healthy community, transfer sporting skills and teach its ideologies to the young. The open spaces in the compounds, the street, village squares and markets constituted the performance spaces for these different entertainments and audiences were involved. There was the immediacy of the performer and his audience, and their presence inspired each other, because the audience could make immediate inputs to the performances.

However, colonization and western education introduced another form of entertainment, the novel or the written story, to Igbo society. According to Emmanuel Obiechina various conditions facilitated the rise of the novel in Africa and they consist of the widening of individual consciousness, the spread of mass media, the rise of the literate middle class, urbanization, cultural nationalism and foreign novelists on West Africa.²² These were effects of Western literacy. Granted, the novel is expansive in its exploration of narrative and circumstantial details but its *modus operandi* contrasts with the art forms of the oral tradition. The writer writes privately and the reader reads on his own, thereby expunging immediacy and communality from entertainment. There are no gestures and physical expressions from the storyteller of a written story to enhance his story; he only describes them. The reader of a novel who is unable to make any input to the story or in what Bakhtin refers to as “mute perception”,²³ is left to generate the gestures in his imaginations while, at the same time, struggling with the English language with which most of the novels are written. This condition, I believe,

²¹ Achebe, C, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” in *Hopes and Impediments*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1988, p.42

²² Obiechina, E N, *Culture, Tradition and Society in the West African Novel*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1975, PP 7 – 24.

²³ Bakhtin, M M, *The Dialogic Imagination* (Ed by Holquist, M; Trans by Emerson C & Holquist M), Austin (Texas), University of Texas Press, 1981, p.3

has not inspired a good percentage of today's Igbo population to read the novels. This is not condemning the novel as an art form but recognizing its peculiarity from what the people were used to. Obiechina observes that the Igbo and Nigerians "are very close to the oral culture and its impact on the ear and less so to the culture of the written word, with its appeal to the eye".²⁴ The literary declination towards the novels is more acute in this age, when majority of Igbo (and African) population appear mentally drained in their struggles to survive the continuous economic deterioration. Under this condition, many people are prone to evade activities, such as reading, which they consider as extra-tasking their imaginative faculties.

There is noticeable dissipation of the excitement that greeted the written stories in the late 1940s and in the 1950s. Indeed, according to Charles Larson, school leavers of those periods who flocked to the urban cities in search of new life demanded stories of characters they could identify with, "instead of the Victorian novels taught in the British-controlled educational system".²⁵ That sort of demand has definitely disappeared among our contemporary school leavers who still throng into the urban areas in search of greener pastures. The truth we have to admit is that in Igbo society, novel reading has remained an entertainment art for minority of the population both in the early days when urbanization and the reading of written stories were 'novelties' and in this contemporary period when many school leavers (secondary and tertiary alike) are likely spending the rest of their lives without touching any novels. In other words, that minority of the population is being further diminished; it appears that circumstances determined by economic and political realities have subtracted a good number who read the novels from the literate middle class and left the novels only in the hands of the literary scholars, which constitutes a small section of the literate middle class. Novel reading can be classified as an elitist culture or practice.

The tragedy of the situation is that the novel came with a dominant western lifestyle, which has gradually swept aside the traditional forms of entertainment that we are almost in an artistic and cultural limbo. On its own, the novel, as observed by Bakhtin, tends towards hegemony as a literary genre wherever it springs, causing the decline of

²⁴ Obiechina E., "The Writer and His Commitment in Contemporary Nigerian Society", in *Okike* (African Journal of New Writing), No 27/28, Nigeria, March 1988, p. 9

²⁵ Larson, C, *The Emergence of African Fiction* (Revised Ed), London, Macmillan, 1978, p.70

other genres.²⁶ In our society, however, the novel form, it could be argued, flourished alongside the traditional forms of entertainment until the early 1980s but from the mid 1980s both forms have continued to decline. In suggesting that the novels be adapted to stage, my intention is to present the written stories with the help of our traditional forms of entertainment so that both the oral and literate forms of entertainments can support each other to stand and blossom on Igbo soil. The hybrid situation in which we have found ourselves as a people could no longer be ignored and I thought that the reasonable thing to do was to find an equidistant position which offers elements of our traditional theatre and cultural entertainments the chance to be revitalised through representations and reinterpretations while at the same time canvassing new appreciation for the novels.

My confidence that this undertaking will yield positive results emanates from my personal experiences as an Igbo, who has worked among the Igbo in various capacities. From 1983 to 1989 I was a 'Senior Seminarian' aspiring to the Catholic Priesthood and part of my training was to spend eight weeks of every long vacation (summer holiday in the West) with any community to which I was sent on Apostolic Work. My experience at Umunneoha in 1985, a community with a strong masquerade tradition, was that the people, in spite of their Christian faith, still cherished their masquerade theatre and the associated rituals. On my part, growing up in my own village, I performed with my peers, the youth masquerades known as *Ułaga* and *Ojionu*, and I joined the adult masquerade group at the Major Seminary at Enugu for our Cultural Day. All these, unlike the Umunneoha masquerade, were pure entertainments with no rituals. However, those experiences point to the fact that irrespective of the impact of colonisation and Christianity, the Igbo still long for their traditional art forms. I was ordained a Catholic priest in 1990 and I worked both in the rural and urban areas including a return to Umunneoha as a Parish Vicar in 1991 and my appointment as the Assistant Secretary to my diocese of Owerri in 1992. Among other performances within the first three years of my ordination was my musical adaptation of Acts 3, *Peter na Onye Ngworo* (Peter and the Lame Man) performed by St Paul's Station Choir, Umunneoha, at the diocesan music festival in 1991. Later in 1993, I was sent to develop the youth choir, Alvana Catholic Young Voices (Alvana), at the Catholic

²⁶ Bakhtin, M M, Ibid, p.4

Chaplaincy of Alvan Ikoku College of Education in Owerri in 1993. I worked with the amazing talents in the choir and we were able to build Alvana into an iconic youth performance group not just for the music but also for drama and dance. During my three years with the group, I wrote and directed a number of plays, including *Nkemakolam* (1996), for the first Odenigbo cultural night. My experiences with Alvana and the responses to our performances by the Owerri public (with more details in Chapter Four) convinced me that the stage is indeed a powerful tool to inspire change in society and sometimes more effective than the pulpit.

Coming to the United Kingdom (UK), I also gave time to drama, music and dance with Igbo children, youths and adults as a community worker and was involved in the production of an Igbo international magazine, *World Igbo Times*. The magazine survived only for three years (2002 – 2005) mainly because its primary target was the Igbo who either found it difficult to part with two pounds in a quarter for a magazine or considered reading very tedious. Considering the different responses I experienced with the performances and the magazines; considering that most of those who complained about the cost of the magazine could spend over a hundred pounds every summer on tickets to parties; that partying groups found it more appealing to pay much more for any of our performance groups than take out an advert in the magazine; that energetic and stimulating dance like the *Atilogwu* engages Igbo audience more than a play from a written script, I came to believe that kinaesthesia would have to be involved in the telling of our stories.

Drama and performance can impact more on people's lives because they come very natural to communities, just as Turner has suggested that the social lives of coherent communities, like those in Africa, are potentially "theatrical".²⁷ He argues that the sequences of the events that spring up to create the 'social dramas' among villagers are homologous to "the characteristic 'processual form' of Western drama, from Aristotle onwards...."²⁸ "Thus, the roots of theatre are social drama, and social drama accords well with Aristotle's abstraction of dramatic form from the works of the Greek playwrights."²⁹ Social drama is a story with a beginning, a middle and an end as in Aristotle's *Poetics* in which Aristotle himself describes tragedy or drama as imitation

²⁷ Turner, V, Ibid, p.9

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p.11

of life (reality).³⁰ In other words, life is drama. Turner identifies the dramatic as “spontaneous unit of social process” which has four phases: “breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegration or recognition of schism. Social dramas occur within groups bounded by shared values and interests of persons and having a real or alleged common history.”³¹ In referring to the Indian philosophers who describe life as “*maya* and *lila* – illusion, play, and theatre in a grand scale”³², Richard Schechner supports Turner in arguing that the life we live is drama. According to him, the world is a great theatre – the *theatrum mundi* of the Renaissance period – and as described in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, all men and women are merely players. “To people living in the *theatrum mundi* everyday life was theatrical and, conversely, theatre offered a working model of how life was lived.”³³ It is based on this conviction that life and theatre are somewhat inseparable that Schechner disagrees with the idea of a vertical origin of theatre, which I will later explain in Chapter Four.

My point, then, is that the Igbo, like other human communities are naturally inclined toward drama and theatre. That is why I argue that our stories told in the novels are more likely to make more impact on our society if they are dramatised because of the “proximity of theatre to life”³⁴, as Turner has observed. Ngugi wa Thiong’o and his colleagues who began the Kamiriithu Community Education and Cultural Centre, recognised this fact about human life that they took to dramatisation or community theatre in helping the people to tell their stories. According to Ngugi, the Kamiriithu theatre experience was initiated at the request of a villager who came to him several times with the same request:

We hear you have a lot of education and that you write books. Why don’t you and others of your kind give some of that education to the village? We don’t want the whole amount; just a little of it, and a little of your time.³⁵

³⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, (Trans. By Kenneth McLeish), London, Nick Hern Books, 1998, p.3

³¹ Ibid, p.69

³² Schechner, R, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2nd Ed), NY/London, Routledge, 2006, p.14

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Turner, V, Ibid, p.105

³⁵ Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London, James Currey, 1986, p.34

Ngugi and the other literates did not respond to this request by teaching the people how to read the novels but by bringing them to take part in telling their stories through drama. The process involved bears no distinction from Augusto Boal's (Forum Theatre) Theatre of the Oppressed and Theatre for Development in Africa or even Community Theatre in other places. The idea behind these forms of theatre is to use drama or theatre as a propaganda tool for the people's benefit in remote places. Using drama as propaganda in this manner was fully utilised by the colonial regime, extending into post-independence Africa and that is why such practice as Theatre for Development uses the same form to counter the colonial and neo-colonial intentions of keeping "control and goal-setting" out of the hands of the masses.³⁶ "Capable of reaching remote target audiences", David Kerr observes that theatre is seen as another 'mass' media and that UNESCO goes as far as describing it as 'folk media'.³⁷ As folk media, theatre's task then is 'edutainment' – to educate or enlighten society while providing entertainment. When we consider that enlightenment, "education, in the best sense of that word"³⁸ is Achebe's mission in writing his novels, we will appreciate his stories told through a folk media, such as theatre.

The theme of enlightenment is pronounced in *A Man of the People* as the author uses the narrator and hero of the novel to lead us through a discovery journey in order to see, from his point of view, what went wrong with the new nation-state left behind by the colonial regime. As C. L. Innes observes, "the novel is concerned with learning – Odili's and the reader's"³⁹ and this is supported by the 'voyage and return' plot employed in the narrative. The voyage and return plot presupposes ignorance as the hero finds himself in an unfamiliar territory but returns with new knowledge and discovery. It is my opinion that Achebe considered the task of enlightenment a necessary duty for himself, an educated elite of the post-independence era, believing that people have the power to fight corruption but can only do so within the limits of their knowledge and authority. This is one of my interpretations of the Josiah incident in the novel. The people could punish Josiah for his corrupt practice because they understand their own social values, having instituted them, and therefore are empowered to take action against a breach – because they clearly understand when a

³⁶ Kerr, D, *African Popular Theatre*, Oxford, James Currey, 1995, p.149

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Achebe, C, "The Novelist as Teacher", in *Hopes and Impediments*, NY, Anchor Books, 1988, p.44

³⁹ Inne, C L, *Chinua Achebe*, Cambridge, Cambridge Uni Press, 1990, p.92

“breach” as Turner might say, has occurred. However, they take no action against Nanga but honour and extol him even when he employs the ostracized Josiah as a thug. I believe it is through knowledge that people acquire power and authority and what happens in *A Man of the People*, in the relationship between Nanga and Josiah is a clear indication that the people lack knowledge of this system of government which Nanga represents; otherwise, they would have taken an adequate action against Nanga for infringement of their will. A situation of this kind, where the government is distanced from the people, therefore, demands that the educated and intellectuals of society should rise to the occasion and bridge the gap by educating the people. This is what, in my view, Achebe did for the post-independence African society, which I also consider a task he maps out for the hero of this novel, Odili, who gained knowledge sitting at Nanga’s feet (p.39). It is because of this thinking that I created a political campaign speech for Odili in my adaptation script (Act 2 Scene 4), using the relationship between Nanga and Josiah to inform his listeners that Nanga is corrupt and disregards the people’s will.

It is because of my experience of today’s Nigerian political climate which I consider similar to that of the post-independence period that I thought I should contribute to public enlightenment by retelling the story of that period, using what I regard a more accessible media – theatre. *A Man of the People* is replete with drama, with twists and turns in the three way relationship involving Odili, Nanga and Edna; there are betrayals and rebellions, culminating in military coup and yet a happy ending for Odili and Edna. Though, I was not keen on including the marriage of Edna to Odili in the Performance Script, I have given it attention in my Final Draft (Act 3 Scene 4), interpreting it as a projection of a new nation free from colonial ties and inducement, where the constituent parts mutually agree to be together. I tried to adopt a hermeneutical approach in my script-writing of this adaptation and I take responsibility for them. My intention to do so can be deciphered right from the title of my adaptation, *Kingdom of the Mask*, which I believe lifts the mask off the face of ‘*A Man of the People*’, for a mask does not only conceal but also reveals.

It is not only my interpretation of the novel that this research project aims at revealing. An important task for me in this research project is to investigate the processes that lie ahead for an adapter of an Igbo novel to stage. The actions taken in order to achieve

this task, therefore, include, choosing a novel (for reasons expatiated in Chapter One, I chose Achebe's *A Man of the People*), seeking copyright permission (not really needed for an academic exercise but which I undertook for the experience of it.⁴⁰), script writing, stage production and critical analysis, which this dissertation seeks to address.

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, "Defining the Igbo and the Igbo Novel", I briefly describe Igbo historical, socio-political and literary backgrounds which I consider pertinent to our understanding of *A man of the People* and my adaptation of it. It begins with a brief description of the Igbo as a people, for, as Edward Said rightly observed, "society and literary culture can only be understood and studied together"⁴¹; then, it goes on to discuss how critics like Ernest Emenyonu came about the concept known as Igbo novel. The 'Igbo novel' as a concept cannot claim such popularity as "African novel" or "Post-colonial Literature" but forms part of it. I support the view that concepts like "African novel or literature" should not be understood as one unit but as a group of associated units".⁴² The Igbo novel is one of the associated units. I argue that it would be helpful in this dissertation if I explained what the concept of the 'Igbo novel' is all about. In this chapter, I also offer my arguments for stage adaptation, looking at the differences between the novel and the stage. This is followed by my explanation of the reasons why I chose *A Man of the People* among other novels.

Chapter Two is the adaptation script, which I refer to in this work as the Final Draft. This script is a revised edition of the draft used for the stage production, otherwise known as the Performance Script. The Performance Script is included in the appendix but its stage production and audience response are discussed in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I offer my reasons for the choices I made in writing the Performance Script. In spite of those reasons, I still had to review the Performance Script and the stage production, taking on board, some useful criticisms from both the live and video audiences of the adaptation. This revision, which led to the Final Draft, affected the structure, characters and content of the play. It is in Chapter Five, "Critical Reflections

⁴⁰ Obtaining the Copyright Permission involved a number of email correspondences between my faculty administration and Achebe's literary agent, Emma Sweeney. She demanded a hard copy request by post which I sent. She sent copyright permission by post to me.

⁴¹ Said, E, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin, (with New Preface, 2003), p.27

⁴² Achebe, C, "English and the African Writer", *Transition*, IV, p.18 (1965) quoted in Emenyonu, E, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, Ibid, p.xi.

on the Adaptation and Performance”, that I explain why I made these changes. This work contains some pictures from both rehearsals and performance production and I have also attached a video disk at the back, containing ten clips for visual clarity. References are made to these visual and audio-visual materials where necessary.

I use the Conclusion to summarise as well as to evaluate this idea of adapting Achebe’s novel and other Igbo novels for the stage. In the Conclusion, I share my personal experiences in writing the script and this dissertation. Some of these experiences include the emotional engagement and the challenges I had to face, which I think could also be useful to other writers because it is through reading that I was able to overcome some of those gruelling moments. Through reading, I was able to discover that accomplished writers pass through the same crucible to reach their goals. It is, therefore, only fair that other writers who come across my work can take courage from knowing that the difficulties they face are not peculiar. In this Conclusion, I have also shared other practical lessons I learnt in the process of staging the adaptation, especially with reference to adapting Achebe’s novels, which promote the community ethos.

Since my purpose in this research project is to find the best possible means of keeping the Igbo stories alive for our generation and to chart a way forward for future generations, adapting the stories that promote the community to stage drama, I argue, is the best means of telling the stories. The story, according to Daniel Dennett, is “Our fundamental tactic of self-protection, self control, and self-definition...”,⁴³ it is an ontological reality of human existence. David Lodge supports Dennett, commenting that human beings cannot but tell stories, just as spiders make webs and beavers build dams.⁴⁴ If, as Maggie Butt puts it, “An insatiable appetite for stories is hard-wired into human beings....”⁴⁵, then it is logical to assert that human life depreciates if deprived of stories. Achebe upholds that the story “saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence....it is the story that owns us and directs us. It is the thing that makes us different from cattle; it is the mark on the face that sets one people apart from their neighbours.”⁴⁶ Similarly, Robert McKee makes reference to

⁴³ Dennett, D, *Consciousness Explained* (Penguin, 1993), quoted by David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, London, Penguin, 1992, p.15

⁴⁴ Lodge, D, *Consciousness and the Novel*, London, Penguin, 2003, p.15

⁴⁵ Butt, M, “Magic and Imagination”, (Introduction) in Butt, M (ed), *Story: The Heart of the Matter*, London, Greenwich Exchange, 2007, p.xv

⁴⁶ Achebe, C, *Anthills of the Savannah*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1987, p.124.

Aristotle when he writes that “when storytelling goes bad, the result is decadence.”⁴⁷ It is because I have observed decadence seeping through the pores of my society, arguably, for the lack of a particular mode of storytelling, that I am in search, not just a way of reviving our stories but of the best effective means of reaching our people with them, because a story told is a story heard and a story heard can lead to change and save society from degeneration.

⁴⁷ Mckee, R, *Story*, London, Methuen, 1999, p.13

Chapter One

DEFINING THE IGBO AND THE IGBO NOVEL

The relationship between the novel as narrative and nation or a people makes it important for me to introduce the Igbo and explain its nationhood.

Before colonization and the creation of Nigeria in 1914, Igbo existed as a separate entity with its own administration, culture and language also known as Igbo. Writing in the 18th century, Olaudah Equiano referred to the Igbo as a nation⁴⁸ but more than a century later colonial administrators and writers referred to it as a tribe. According to Adiele Afigbo, one of the first to do so was Major A G Leonard in his work, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes*, published in 1906. Leonard wrote about the Igbo as “a tribe, but in no sense a nation...”⁴⁹ This has led to the misconception of the Igbo, especially within the international community, as a tribe in Nigeria while Nigeria is addressed as a nation.

Nation, for minds like Ernest Renan, refers to “something fairly new in history,” unfamiliar to antiquity. The term, nation, brings to mind places like France, England, Germany, Italy, Spain, USA and others that have one government, speak one language and have forgotten that they are composed of different races.⁵⁰ This is favoured by Benedict Anderson’s definition of a nation as “an imagined political community” in which the people imagine themselves as part of a group.⁵¹ Many expect Nigeria, formulated in the modern era, to fall into this imagined category. However, Nigeria, like many other African countries, imagined and created by external forces without the consultation or acquiescence of its peoples but for the administrative convenience of the colonial regime, I argue, cannot as yet claim full nationhood because the system lacks proper integration of the people. In 2009, Wole Soyinka made the same observation in his lecture titled “Between Nationhood and Nation Space,”

⁴⁸ Equiano, O, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, 1789 (edited by Vincent Carretta, London, Penguin, 2003, p.38

⁴⁹ Afigbo, A, *Igbo: History and Society* (Ed. by Toyin Falola), New Jersey, African World Press, 2005, p.426

⁵⁰ Renan, E, “What is a Nation?” in Bhabha H K (Ed) *Nation and Narration*, London, Routledge, 1990 pp.9-10

⁵¹ Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Rev. and extended ed.). London: Verso. 1991, pp. 6–7.

Is Nigeria a nation today? My answer is - Not yet. Is Nigeria aspiring to be a nation? The answer - Unsure. Can it? Possibly. Should it? My answer to that is absolutely non-sentimental, purely technical and subjective. "I prefer not to have to apply for yet another visa when I need to travel to Enugu or Borno."⁵²

The constituent parts of Nigeria still bear and promote their distinctive cultural and linguistic identities. The body of literature that is being written in the vernacular is increasing rather than dwindling as we shall see later in this chapter from Emenyonu's research. The concept, 'Igbo novel,' would not have arisen, if the Igbo did not consider themselves as constituting a nation. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which won the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction in 2007, is in itself, a reiteration of the Igbo national expression reinforced by the Biafran war.⁵³ The war, as Adichie rightly observed, has remained up this day, a determining factor in Nigerian politics and policies.⁵⁴ The chances of achieving nationhood for the Nigerian state are further jeopardized by visionless and corrupt politicians as well as military rulers who have been at the helm of its affairs since its independence from colonial regime. It seems to me that the Yoruba portray even more nationalistic fervour than the Igbo without the compromise that has become the hallmark and bane of the Igbo. The inherent nationalism of the Yoruba and the Edo who had massive kingdoms and empires stretching beyond modern day Nigeria and who still retain their kings in unbroken and/or traceable lineages is more likely to prove a stronger barrier to Nigeria's nationhood than corrupt politicians, governments or ruling systems.

I argue that it is Nigeria's inability to achieve nationhood that encourages some of its constituent parts, such as Igbo, not to relinquish their nationhood. Nation as Timothy Brennan argues, "is both historically determined and general. As a term, it refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous – the *natio* – a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging."⁵⁵ Brennan goes further to

⁵² "How IBB Robbed Nigeria of Nationhood –Soyinka", Daily Sun <http://odili.net/news/source/2009/mar/4/502.html> Wednesday, 4 March, 2009

⁵³ Between 1967-1970, the Igbo alongside their Efik neighbours, fought as Biafra against Nigeria's aggression to keep them under Nigerian government. Biafra had seceded from Nigeria after witnessing the ruthless massacre of tens of thousands of her people, including women and children across Nigeria.

⁵⁴ Adichie C N, 'Audio Interview with Mariella Frostrup', BBC Radio 4, 20 August, 2006.

⁵⁵ Brennan, T, "The National Longing for Form", in Bhabha, H K, Ibid, p.45

quote Raymond Williams, whose etymological approach even makes a stronger case to define Igbo as a nation:

‘Nation’ as a term is radically connected with ‘native’. We are *born* into relationships which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and ‘placeable’ bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial.⁵⁶

The artificiality of the modern nation-states, which is very pronounced in post-colonial Africa, is narrated in *A Man of the People*, where nationhood is defined by ‘cake-sharing’ (p. 12). In liberating Odili and Edna from their delusive relationships with Chief Nanga and rejoining the two young characters in a freer and unforced marriage to form a new family; in destroying that republic in which Nanga was a minister, the author, unarguably, rewrites the nation against colonial construct, hoping for the emergence of a nation of unforced relationships. Until that dream is realised, I am contented to refer to the Igbo as a nation in this dissertation.

With an estimated thirty to forty million people across the globe, a defined geographical location and its own distinctive culture and language, which is in print, a language with more than a dozen dialects that is read by Igbo people around the world – literary scholars like Chinua Achebe contend that Igbo is not a tribe. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of a tribe connotes primitiveness and a single dialect of a language.⁵⁷ According to Achebe, even though ‘nation’, as defined by the dictionary, may have its own problem when applied to the Igbo, it is the closest term one can employ to describe the Igbo as a people.⁵⁸ Nation according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary is “a country considered as a group of people with the same language, culture and history, who live in a particular area under one government.”⁵⁹ This definition even questions the nationhood of bi-lingual and multi-lingual countries such as Canada and Switzerland, exposing some of the ambiguities surrounding the concept.

⁵⁶ Loc. Cit., quoted from Raymond William, *The Year 2000* (NY, Pantheon, 1983).

⁵⁷ Cf. Tulloch, S (Ed), *The Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus*, Oxford, OUP, 1995, p.1667

⁵⁸ Achebe, C, *Home and Exile*, , NY, Random House, 2000, p.5

⁵⁹ Wehmeier, S (Ed), *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English* (6th ed), Oxford, OUP, 2000, p.780

For the Igbo, having no centralised government in pre-colonial era like their neighbouring Empires is basically the problem Achebe identified in applying the term, 'nation' to the Igbo.

The Igbo nation in precolonial times was not quite any nation most people are familiar with. It did not have a centralized government but a conglomeration of hundreds of independent towns and villages each of which shared the running of its affairs among its menfolk according to title, age, occupation, etc....⁶⁰

Without a centralised government, the Igbo have over the years come to be known as *Igbo enwe(ghi) eze* – 'the Igbo have no king' – or as in Basil Davidson's caption, "Government without kings"⁶¹. Unlike most colonial writers who used the term, 'primitive', to describe the Igbo based on their republicanism and individualism, Davidson rather found some advantages in that system.

Governments like these were good for individual development. People accustomed to a great deal of everyday democracy are people with a great deal of individual self-confidence: they tend to be enterprising, always ready to deal with new problems, easily adaptable to new conditions.⁶²

Afigbo, however, observed that some Igbo communities on the borders practised centralised kingship borrowed from the neighbouring societies such as Benin (in the west) and Igala (in the north). Even in that case, power still resided with the citizens because the excessiveness of a monarch or leader could be easily ridiculed.⁶³ The Igbo remained an enigma because despite the fact that they did not possess a centralised government or kingship, there are no records of conquests against them by the warring empires and kingdoms over them.

As would be expected, different communities, as Victor Ukaegbu observes, "offer related, and sometimes unrelated, accounts of their descent...."⁶⁴ Whatever any of the communities may claim as their origin, the common denominator for all Igbo towns

⁶⁰ Achebe, C, *Home and Exile*, Ibid, p.6

⁶¹ Davidson, B, *West Africa Before Colonial Era*, London, Longman, 1998, p.127.

⁶² Loc. Cit.

Afigbo, A, *Igbo: History and Society* (edited by Toyin Falola), NJ, African World Press Inc, 2005, p.212

⁶⁴ Ukaegbu, V, *The use of Masks in Igbo Theatre in Nigeria: The Aesthetic Flexibility of Performance Traditions*, Lewiston, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007, p.13

and villages is their language and culture, variations of dialect and cultural practices notwithstanding. Igbo culture promotes the communal philosophy, which bestows absolute wisdom and power to community and this is encapsulated in the saying, *umunna wu ike* which literally translates as ‘kinsmen are strength.’ This is the Igbo socio-political philosophy, which checks the excesses and inordinate egocentricities of the individual capable of causing harm to society. Even though the Igbo social structure is at the same time communal and individual, the people were wary of individuals imposing themselves or their wills on the community. Every grown up male had the right to air his opinion at the gathering of the clan. A typical Igbo community comprises the living, the dead ancestors and the gods that the community identifies with.

There are four gods that are identified with the Igbo economy and they are named after the market days – Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo. Each town or village has a market named after one of these gods who are considered the legendary hero-sons of the founder-ancestor of the Igbo.⁶⁵ The market days provide opportunities for neighbouring towns and villages to participate not only in the economic but also in the ideological and aesthetic lives of one another. This accounts for the importance of Onitsha market located at the bank of the lower Niger in the dissemination of foreign ideologies sold through literature with the advent of Europeans in Igbo land. Igbo economy also depended much on farming as on trading. Other means of livelihood were iron working, carving, weaving and pottery.

Igbo society like many other societies was organised into families. Male heads represented families just as the eldest of a village represented his village at town meetings. This is the structure of Igbo traditional government where the eldest or the chief priest presided over the gathering of the community. As already observed above, this representational arrangement did not exclude any male adult from attending councils and airing his opinion. This system of government, considered naturally democratic, was to be replaced by colonial authoritarian regime which appointed Warrant Chiefs over the elders of the communities.⁶⁶ With the colonial arrangement,

⁶⁵ Ibid, p.16

⁶⁶ Cf Achebe, C, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1983, p.48

governance was totally removed from the people because their opinions did not count any more. It is this kind of governance that we shall encounter in *A Man of the People*.

In the homes, the women played leading roles in domestic work and in educating the children. Education in Igbo land, especially, moral education as observed by Gregory Njoku, was actually a communal enterprise⁶⁷ as elders and older ones had the right to correct and teach any child the ways of the community, regardless of one's parentage. Education in pre-colonial times was both formal and informal. Formal education involved instructing those who aspired to a higher culture in the land – secret or titled society. These were taught the language proper for the status they sought to achieve. For informal education, Afigbo explains that

As people grew up and helped their parents or older relations with the daily chores – hewed wood and drew water, cooked and ate, attended the farm and market, learnt village crafts, traded folk-tales or played in the moonlight – they learnt the techniques, ethics, mysteries and values of each department of life along with the language appropriate to it. Among such great farmers as the Ezza of Abakaliki there runs a saying that the farm is the school for the young.⁶⁸

Within the pre-colonial context, Igbo language was a complete language because the people possessed the vocabularies adequate enough to express the world around them. Apart from the language of everyday communication the young people also learnt artistic language as they traded folktales and played in the moonlight. These were forms of recreation among the Igbo. According to G T Basden, “When he seeks entertainment, the Ibo (*sic*) enters into it whole-heartedly; he lets nothing interfere with the pleasure of the moment.”⁶⁹ This does not seem to be the case in contemporary Igbo society with the noticeable disappearance of some of those forms of recreation and entertainment, including the folktales and moonlight plays.

The Igbo occupy a landmass of about sixteen thousand square metres (approximation) that stretches across the River Niger. This area is described by Basil Davidson as

⁶⁷ Njoku G. U., *Ibid.*, pp 48 -49

⁶⁸ Afigbo, A. E. “The place of Igbo Language in our Schools: A Historical Explanation,” in Ogbalu & Emenanjo, *Ibid.*, p. 72

⁶⁹ Basden, G.T., *Niger Ibos*, London, FrankCass & Co. Ltd, 1966, p.342

a rich belt of the forest country between the ocean and the grassland plains that was the scene of many important developments in the distant past. Today the region has some of the densest countryside populations in any part of Africa, and this appears to have been the case in much earlier periods as well.⁷⁰

In contemporary Nigeria, there are ten states of the Federation that are home to the Igbo. Five of them, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo are regarded as core Igbo States because they do not share the states with other ethnic groups as they do in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta and Rivers States. Indeed, among the rest of the thirty-six states of the Federation, the Igbo are known to be the second largest population after the local indigenes. It is not an overstatement to say that there is no country on earth where Igbo people cannot be found, living and working. There are theories of Igbo migration that claim that the Igbo must have arrived in their present location in the Southeast of Nigeria from somewhere else. Against such theories, the popular Igbo historian, Elizabeth Isichei, writes that anthropological findings established that the Igbo have been living in their present location “if not from the dawn of human history...at least for a long period of continuous settlement”.⁷¹ This is supported by recent anthropological claims by Catherine Acholonu’s team that the Igbo predate Adam with a publication titled, *They Lived Before Adam: Prehistoric Origins of the Igbo, The Never-Been-Ruled*.⁷² In linking many ancient languages to the Igboukwu art, Acholonu argues that Igbo is very central to human civilization and that it is the Igbo who have maintained the original form of the *kwa* language family from which many other African languages around the Niger-Congo river basin have developed. After linking many Igbo words to different languages across the globe, including English, Acholonu writes:

These powerful and scientific pieces of evidence lead to one conclusion: that Igbo is a major chunk of the missing link in the search for the proto-proto-language of humanity – the original seed language/Mother-Tongue. This discovery equally places the Igbo at the origin of human civilizations and long before it. Archaeology and oral tradition seem to support, rather than disprove this linguistic evidence in pointing to an over 500,000

⁷⁰ Basil D., *West Africa Before the Colonial Era*, London, 1998, p.125

⁷¹ Isichei, E, *The Igbo People and the Europeans: The Genesis of a Relationship*, London, Faber & Faber 1970, pp 19-20 quoted in Ukaegbu V., *Ibid*, p.14

⁷² Available at Catherine Acholonu Research Centre for African Studies (<http://www.carcafriculture.org>)

year old Acheulian Igbo habitation excavated in present-day Igbo land by eminent archaeologist Professor Francis Anozie of the Nsukka School, backed by a cosmology that is at once universal and Pre-Adamic.⁷³

According to Davidson, “Archaeology and the study of languages support the opinion that it was from this region that pioneering groups of early Iron Age people carried the knowledge of iron-working into the distant lands of the Congo basin.”⁷⁴ For detailed history and understanding of the Igbo, one would need to read such historians and anthropologists as Elizabeth Isichei, Adiele Afigbo, F C Ogbalu and Nolie Emenanjo and Catherine Acholonu. A full account of Igbo history would help one to see why there is a sense in which many Igbo intellectuals think of the Igbo as occupying a special place in the human family. Whether some people agree with these claims or not, what is certain for many scholars is that the Igbo have contributed enormously in shaping human history and writing has been one explicit means of this contribution.

In writing, the Igbo can boast of some of the best literary artists in the world, from Chinua Achebe down to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Though the Igbo had their various forms of writing prior to slavery and colonisation, it was the alphabetic writing that provided them opportunities to contribute to a wider understanding of the human race from the African perspective. The first to make such a contribution was Olaudah Equiano (Ekweano), who was captured into slavery but after regaining his freedom, wrote his story, *The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano*. This work, which was the first to link Igbo origin to the Jews,⁷⁵ was a good argument for the slave abolitionists to prove that Africans were as much humans as Europeans, with body and soul. The next was Chinua Achebe with the publication of *Things Fall Apart*, a work that is widely considered to have defined African literature and brought balance to world literature. According to Simon Gikandi “In the very simple and conventional story of Okonkwo, a strong individual and an Igbo hero struggling to maintain the cultural integrity of his people against the overwhelming power of the colonial rule,

⁷³ Acholonu, C, “The Origin of the Igbo - The Chosen People of the True God and the Never-Been-Ruled: Tracing Igbo Divine Rights Through Pre-History, Forgotten Scriptures and Oral Tradition.” (With Contributions from Eddy Olumba and Ajay Prabhakar) First Presented at the 6TH Annual Igbo Conference: “OZOEMENA - THE IGBO HUMAN RIGHTS EXPERIENCES IN NIGERIA AND THE DIASPORA”, Howard University, Washington D.C., April 4TH-5TH, 2008, p.9 (<http://www.carcafriculture.org/articles>)

⁷⁴ Davidson, B., Loc. Cit.

⁷⁵ Equiano, O, *The Interesting Narrative and Other Writings*, England, 1789, (This Version is edited by Vincent Carretta, NY, Penguin, 1985, p.45)

Achebe was able to capture the anxieties of many African readers in the 1950s.”⁷⁶ Michael Thelwell describes Achebe and James Baldwin as two men from the twin poles of Africa and America who “simultaneously emerged to define for our generation new terms of our existence in literature and the world’s imagination...”⁷⁷

Considering these landmark publications and with about forty percent of the novel titles emerging from West Africa within the first decade of post independent Africa written by Igbo writers,⁷⁸ critics like Emenyonu, therefore, thought it worthwhile to examine a literary corpus emerging from this Igbo world. This is how we arrive at the concept of the Igbo novel. When he wrote *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, Emenyonu was contented to define the Igbo novel as a novel written by anyone of Igbo origin, irrespective of the language used. However, in recent times, he has reviewed this concept and would like ‘Igbo novels’ to mean novels written in the Igbo language only. He explains his reason in this interview:

Okay, at that time, I didn’t focus the work only on novels written in Igbo language because there was only a few of them as at that time. But two, three years ago, I went back into research and began to collect novels written in Igbo language and by 2003, I had collected 70 novels written in Igbo language and also 45 plays written in Igbo language. Now, if I am talking about Igbo novels, I talk essentially about novels written in Igbo language. You will be surprised how uninformed we are when we don’t take the time to investigate.⁷⁹

In that investigation, Emenyonu also discovered from British archives that the evolution of the Igbo novel dates back to 1857⁸⁰, when missionary activities took off in Igbo land. Emenyonu’s new conceptualisation of the Igbo novel follows Obi Wali’s argument in 1963 that true African literature has to be written in African languages⁸¹, an argument that is strongly supported by Ngugi wa Thiongo. From the late 1970s, Ngugi had started writing and publishing in his own language, Gikuyu, believing that

⁷⁶ Simon Gikandi, “Achebe and the Invention of African Literature” Ibid., p.x

⁷⁷ Thelwell, M, “Telling the Truth is the only Way...” in Ihekweazu, E (ed) *Eagle on Iroko*, Ibadan, Heinemann, 1996, p.1

⁷⁸ Emenyonu, E, Ibid, pp. ix-x

⁷⁹ Emenyonu, E, “Igbo Novel Dates Back To 1857”(interview with Nwachukwu, McPhilips), Vanguard, Sunday, June 4, 2006 (<http://odili.net/news/source/2006/jun/4/310.html>)

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Thiong’o, Ngugi wa, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Oxford, James Currey, 1986, p.24

writing in African language “is part and parcel of the anti-imperialist struggles of Kenyan and African peoples”.⁸² Chinweizu et al agree that “Ideally, African literature should be written in African languages.” However, they added: “But the same historical circumstances that presently compel African nations to use Western languages as their official languages also compel African writers to write in them. Until those historical circumstances are changed – and we hope they change soon – it is pointless debating whether or not to use these Western languages in our literature”.⁸³ Despite Emenyonu’s new understanding of the concept of the ‘Igbo novel’ as the novel written in Igbo language, I still maintain the earlier meaning for this thesis. Igbo novels from my point of view will, at least for a foreseeable future, always refer to novels written by Igbo writers with focus on the Igbo character and society. Chinweizu et al have argued against the idea of using language as the criterion in determining national literature.

Inclusion within a national literature is something to be determined by shared values and assumptions, world outlook, and other fundamental elements of culture – ethos, in short. Although language does embody and is a vehicle for expressing cultural values, it is not the crucial generator of those values and cannot alone be relied upon to supply literary criteria.⁸⁴

For Chinua Achebe, who is known to disagree with Ngugi on the language of African literature, the important thing is to tell one’s story and not to allow language to be a constraint. The abolition of English (for British colonised territories, for instance), Achebe argues, has problems with no convincing solutions.⁸⁵ It seems to me that Achebe’s position contradicts his mission, which he describes as helping the people regain their self confidence⁸⁶ of which the promotion of indigenous languages is a primary task. However, because this task also involves speaking to the outside world, especially to the colonizers, to refute their misrepresentations, one has a good reason to excuse the use of the colonizer’s tongue. This enables the literary artist to communicate directly to them and avoid the distortions of translations. Even if in the future Igbo

⁸² Ibid, p.28

⁸³ Chinweizu et al, *Towards the Decolonization of African Literature* (Vol.1), Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980, p.242

⁸⁴ Ibid, p.12

⁸⁵ Achebe C, “The Writer and His Community,” in *Hopes and Impediments*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1988, p.41

⁸⁶ Cf. Achebe C, “The Novelist as Teacher”, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, NY, Anchor Books, 1976, p.58

novels are only written in Igbo language, we cannot eliminate from Igbo literary corpus, the great works that have archived important historical moments and social values.

The Choice to adapt an Igbo Novel for the Stage.

Adaptation of novels to stage or screen has not flourished in Igbo land. This is despite the fact that the Igbo are some of the pioneers of African prose by African indigenous writers. By 1933 *Omenukò* by Pita Nwana had been published, followed by the Onitsha Market Literature⁸⁷ through which Cyprian Ekwensi published pamphlet stories like *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales* (1947) and *When Love Whispers* (1948). These were before Amos Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* (1952) which many regard as the pioneer novel form in English language by an indigenous African. However, it is Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) that critics agree has defined not just the African novel, but African Literature. Its publication opened the gates for many more titles by Igbo writers. The many titles by Igbo writers notwithstanding, *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe are the only novels that have been adapted to screen and stage respectively by Igbo artists prior to my adaptation of *A Man of the People*. *Things Fall Apart* has also been adapted for the stage with a Yoruba, Biyi Bandele, as the script writer and Chuck Mike as the director and the productions began in the UK, at the Royal Court at the Ambassadors Theatre and West Yorkshire Playhouse in 1997. The production in Nigeria in 1999 took place in Lagos and in 2003 it was in Lagos and Abuja. *A Man of the People*, I later found out from the internet, has also been adapted for stage in Kenya to help secondary school students pass their exams.⁸⁸

My interpretation of the lack of adaptations is that the Igbo are so slow to celebrate their great novelists for what they have been able to achieve. Adapting novels to stage

⁸⁷ Pamphlet stories written or commissioned by Onitsha market traders in the mid 20th Century to satisfy the desire of the school leavers who were eager to read romance stories of characters they could identify with. According Kurt Thometz, these little books facilitated their culture's change from traditional orality to printed modernity, from Igbo land to Biafra. (Thometz, K, *Life Turns Man Up and Down: High life, useful advice, and mad English [African market Literature]*, NY, Pantheon Books, 2001, p.x

⁸⁸ Njagi, A, "It's the Season for School Drama", in *Daily Nation* (<http://www.nationaudio.com/News/DailyNation/Supplements/lifestyle/22022004/story22027.htm>), Sunday 22 February 2004

celebrates both the writers and their stories, just as University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) celebrated Achebe's 60th Birthday with the adaptation of *Arrow of God* (scripted by Emeka Nwabueze). However, Amaka Igwe, a screenwriter and movie director, explains that fear of copyright requirements – for example – royalty fees, and lack of trained and skilled writers are just some of the reasons why adaptations are rare in Igbo land.⁸⁹ Other people prefer to tell their own 'original' stories, viewing the concept of adaptation as parasitic, taking advantage of the original text, which would therefore mean that adaptation is "inferior and secondary."⁹⁰ This way of thinking may have contributed immensely to the lack of adaptations in Igbo land where every man as Catherine Acholonu would say, 'worships his own spirit'.⁹¹ Linda Hutcheon questions this mentality when she asks: "Why, even according to 1992 statistics, are 85 percent of all Oscar-winning Best Pictures adaptations? Why do adaptations make up 95 percent of all mini series and 70 percent of all the TV movies of the week that win Emmy Awards?"⁹² She further explains that adaptations are appealing because it is a form of art that combines recognition and remembrance with material variation – "the piquancy of surprise".⁹³ Such a combination was a remarkable feature in Igbo oral tradition because stories were constantly adapted to suit places and times in which they were told – a feature for which Emenyonu describes the folk stories as elastic and progressive.⁹⁴ That spirit to repeat and adapt stories did not really continue with the written tales (novels) as evidenced in the small number of adapted novels shown above.

It was my MA research into the Learning and Teaching of English and Literacy in Igbo land that called my attention to this rarity of 'novel to stage' in the society. During the MA research I questioned our appreciation of the written narrative because indifference to the novels among school leavers was apparent. In an effort to understand the root cause of the problem, it came to my awareness that western literacy in the colonised places was rather a utilitarian venture aimed at fortifying the colonial empire and nothing more. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin observed "the study of English and the growth of Empire proceeded from a single ideological climate and that the development of the one is intrinsically bound up with the development of the

⁸⁹ Interview with Amaka Igwe, London, 11 August 2007

⁹⁰ Hutcheon, L, *A Theory of Adaptation*, NY, Routledge, 2006, p.4

⁹¹ Interview with Catherine Acholonu, Abuja, 10 March 2008

⁹² Hutcheon, L, Loc. Cit.

⁹³ Loc. Cit

⁹⁴ Emenyonu, E, Ibid, p.16

other”.⁹⁵ In other words, the colonized were not taught English and literacy for knowledge’s sake but as a means of tightening the colonizer’s grip on the colonized. In turn the colonized sought western education not for knowledge’s sake but for survival purposes. Isichei observes:

The educational system which developed in the colonial era had certain built-in tendencies and biases. Inevitably, those seeking education sought it mainly as a passport to employment, an escape from a life of grinding toil and poverty. A certain measure of utilitarianism is necessary in a developing country and a philosophy of learning for learning’s sake is probably a luxury it cannot afford.... Insensibly, however, this natural bias developed into an obsessive concern with gaining qualifications and preparing for examinations which has blighted the whole educational system.⁹⁶

Consequently, as the years pass by, the enthusiasm with which individuals embraced reading in the schools continues to wane as their lives revolve only around the work through which they earn their living. The redolence of the indifference to reading for reading’s sake not only lingers to the present Igbo generation but is even stronger.

Although not everyone agrees, eight out of ten Igbo people with whom I discussed the present situation are of the opinion that there is less passion for the novels today than in past decades. During this research interview, the director of Imo State Library, Owerri, Mrs Augustina Ndukwu, said that people read for exams⁹⁷ and this is echoed in another interview with the Librarian at the National Library, Owerri, Mrs Ngozi Anyaka, when she said, “people read for a purpose not for pleasure”.⁹⁸ Going through the shelves at both libraries one cannot really make out the reason for the apathy towards the novels – it could be that the government is influenced by the people’s indifference or vice versa. While the National Library focuses its attention on national documents and publications that promote ‘Nigerianism’, the most shocking of the findings was that there was no single novel written by any known Igbo novelist, old or new, on the shelves of Imo State Library. Mrs Ndukwu claimed that people always took away the novels and never returned them. However, at Florida Bookshop, in the same city, the manager,

⁹⁵ Ashcroft B et al, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, Lon, Routledge, 1989, p.3

⁹⁶ Isichei, E, *A History of the Igbo People*, London, 1976, p.189-190

⁹⁷ Interview with Augustina N Ndukwu, Owerri, 27 February 2008

⁹⁸ Interview with Ngozi D. Anyaka, Owerri, 7 March 2008

Immaculata Onyekwere, said that some parents buy novels to keep their children busy during holidays but she said that novels published by African Writers Series (AWS) like Achebe's works, are mostly bought by those visiting home from abroad, especially the United States. According to her, *Things Fall Apart* is the most sought after and she noted that people are always coming in to ask for the film version of the novels,⁹⁹ making a case for the dramatization of the novels.

The MA degree programme provided me a time to reflect on this issue of dramatizing the novels and I wondered how much we would have gained if the novels we read were shown to us on stage as they do in Kenya in recent times.¹⁰⁰ As human beings, we retain stories that have come in direct contact with our five senses more than those that are imagined. There used to be secondary school drama in Igbo land up to the 1980s by students in the drama club/society. However, the texts that were performed were play texts and not novels. If the novels were dramatized in this way, we might have stood a greater chance of returning to the novels in a more relaxed mood and be able to internalise the stories.

Considering the lukewarm attitude towards the novels, I proposed that we should use the dramatic medium to open up the thematic concerns of the novels to the public to increase their palpability. The targeted novels for this practice are not just any kind of novels, they are the type that Achebe writes, the type that 'renders our world more real'¹⁰¹ as John Sunderland might say. Achebe's novels, as Thelwell argues, are instruments of "serious moral and cultural discourse".¹⁰² Such novels are very much part of our history. As such, the stories they bear ought to be told to every Igbo generation just as the oral stories that embodied Igbo ideologies were repeated to every generation, mindful of the fact that without stories of the past, no generation can truly evolve or as Robert McKee puts it, "A culture cannot evolve without honest, powerful storytelling".¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Interview with Immaculata Onyekwere, Owerri, 19 February 2008

¹⁰⁰ Njagi, A, Ibid

¹⁰¹ Sunderland, J, *How to Read a Novel* (Paperback Ed), Lon, Profile Books, 2007, p.xiii

¹⁰² Thelwell, M, Ibid, p.9

¹⁰³ McKee, R., *Story*, Lon, Methuen, 1999, p.13

Achebe's stories are honest and powerful. Born in 1930 to a Catechist converted by Anglican missionaries, Albert Chinualumogu (shortened to Chinua) Achebe attended St Philip's Central School in his home town Ogidi, then Government College Umuahia and University College, Ibadan. From 1954 he worked as a producer and a director for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation after a few months of secondary school teaching. By 1958, he was made Controller of the Eastern Region of the Broadcasting Corporation. Later he became its Director of External Broadcasting before the outbreak of genocide against the Easterners (Biafrans) which developed into civil war (1967-1970). He took up diplomatic assignments for Biafra during the crisis and also taught in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Achebe's writings are not born out of fantasy but bear true life experiences. He believes, or in his own words, 'insists', "that art is and was always, in the service of man."¹⁰⁴

With this view, Achebe has influenced every generation of African writers after him to use the arts to build society. According to James Currey in his book, *Africa Writes Back*, Maya Jaggi, a journalist for *The Guardian*, "quoted Ngugi wa Thiong'o as saying that Chinua Achebe, 'made a whole generation of African people believe in themselves and in the possibility of their being writers'".¹⁰⁵ That is not hard to see because it was Achebe who recommended Ngugi's first novel for publication, working as the editorial adviser for Heinemann's African Writers Series – a position he was appointed to in 1962.

Writing for the good of society, Achebe's novels are historical and therefore represent reality in fictional mode. I propose to use the stage to retell the stories not only because drama is close to oral cultural practice like storytelling but also because of its efficacy in representing reality. According to Stuart Spencer, theatre as an art form is the most vigorous way of telling a story because it combines all the best parts of other media – prose and screen.¹⁰⁶ Theatre presents a story with great intensity because it hasn't got the space and time for rigmarole like prose and film. In a narrative for instance, after stating what a character said, the writer can take more lines to explain the emotions,

¹⁰⁴ Achebe, C, "Africa and Her Writers" in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, NY, Anchor Books, 1976, p.25

¹⁰⁵ Currey J, *Africa Writes Back: The African Writers Series & The Launch of African Literature*, Oxford, James Currey, 2008, p.23

¹⁰⁶ Spencer, S, *The Playwright's Guidebook*, NY, Faber & Faber, 2003, p.12-13

expressions and movements of the character while in theatre the actor captures the words, emotions, gestures and movements as one indivisible piece of action.

Another reason for proposing adaptation is my understanding that Achebe began to write in response to colonial literature. The implication is that a foreign, colonial, audience would have been on his mind while restoring subjectivity and objective history to his people. This does not mean that the West was the only audience in his mind but rather, that responding to inaccuracies in colonial literature on Africa was a major influence. According to Simon Gikandi

Achebe felt impelled to define and redefine the project of African literature precisely because whenever he looked around him, he was confronted by the overwhelming hegemony of colonialist rhetoric on Africa – what he once called ‘the sedate prose of the district-officer-government-anthropologist of sixty or seventy years ago’ – which the African intellectual has had to wrestle, like Jacob and the angel, at almost every juncture of our contemporary history.¹⁰⁷

To be ‘impelled’ means that something is forcing you to act. Arguably, it was colonial misrepresentations of Africa alongside his own creative impulse that impelled Achebe to write and respond to European colonial writers and administrators. In some of his critical essays, Achebe makes references to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Joyce Cary’s (colonial administrator) *Mr Johnson* as examples of those misrepresentations of Africa. Achebe disagrees with Conrad’s description of Africa as “prehistoric earth” and “unknown planet”¹⁰⁸; he disagrees with Cary’s creation of a Nigerian character known as Mr Johnson thereby debunking the colonial administrators’ ‘I know my natives’¹⁰⁹ claim. To undertake this task of responding to colonial imaging of Africa more effectively, Achebe had to employ the narrative technique which is considered a more suitable genre for countering the colonizer’s fixed image of the colonized, for rewriting history. As Edward Said puts it, “narrative by which history is represented”

...asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake “classical”

¹⁰⁷ Gikandi, S, *Reading Chinua Achebe*, London/Portsmouth, James Currey, Heinemann, 1991, p.6

¹⁰⁸ Conrad, J, *Heart of Darkness*, London, Penguin Classic, 1902, p.51

¹⁰⁹ Achebe C, “Colonialist Criticism”, in Ashcroft B et al (Eds) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 1995, p.58

civilization; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation and not an objective condition of history. Narrative in short, introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision...¹¹⁰

The novel narrative has the time and space to tell an extended story, commenting, via a narrator, on particular events and characters. It allows the advantage of travelling to distant places and different locations to influence individual minds. On the other hand, the novel is an individual enterprise, which some critics, like Eustace Palmer, have argued is a western genre and does not suit the African literary environment. According to him, the fact that African oral traditions are incorporated in the African novels does not mean these are offshoot of African oral tradition. "Much as we would like to think so for nationalistic and other reasons, the novel, unlike poetry and drama, is not an indigenous African genre...The novel grew out of the Western novel and writers like Achebe, Laye and Ekwensi were much more influenced by Conrad, Hardy, Dickens, Kafta, and George Eliot than by the African oral tale."¹¹¹ With Palmer's *Growth of the African Novel* published a year after Emenyonu's *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, this quotation could pass for a critique of Emenyonu's statement that "Contemporary Igbo novel, poetry or drama is the extension of Igbo oral literature".¹¹² Though Palmer's position is re-echoed by some African critics like Catherine Acholonu in her critical review of Emenyonu's *The Rise of the Igbo Novel* ¹¹³, other critics like Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jamie and Ikehukwu Madubuike do not agree with Palmer. The oral traditions of which Palmer claims that their 'incorporation' into the novels does not make the novel an African genre, are for Chinweizu et al, the real antecedents to the African novel. The African novel for Chinweizu and other critics is not defined by European accounts of the novel tradition but by their themes and techniques and use of African tales, fables, epigrams, proverbs and all the narrative textures that can be found in the oral tales.¹¹⁴ Chinweizu and his colleagues, however, appreciate the fact that the coming of Europeans was instrumental to novel writing in Africa.

¹¹⁰ Said, E, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin Books, 1978, p.240

¹¹¹ Palmer, E, *Growth of the African Novel*, London, Heinemann, 1979, p.5

¹¹² Emenyonu, E, *Ibid*, p.2

¹¹³ Cf Acholonu, C, "E. N. Emenyonu, *The Rise of the Igbo Novel*, Ibadan, Oxford University Press, 1978, 400pp, in Jones Eldred D (Edit) *African Literature Today*, 13, London, Heinemann, 1983, p.226-227

¹¹⁴ Chinweizu, et al, *Toward the Decolonization of African Literature* (vol.1), Enugu, Fourth Dimension, 1980, p.27

Going back to Palmer's argument that the African novel grew out of the western novel, the implication here is that the circumstances that gave rise to the growth of the novel in the West might be similar to those that gave rise to the African novel. In the West, Ian Watt observes the influence of the philosophical thinking of Descartes and John Locke in the development of the novel. Descartes' self definitive statement, 'I think therefore I am' (*Cogito ergo sum*) is the novelist's motivation to first and foremost assert the primacy of his existence as Defoe did with his autobiographical memoirs.¹¹⁵ For the African writer, with Achebe or Ngugi as our examples, it wasn't as much a need to define his individuality, as it was a need to define his community misrepresented by colonial redefinition. Though, for a writer like Achebe who incorporates his Igbo philosophical background, one's individuality is best defined in relation to the community. It is in one's community, in relation to the other that one finds self fulfilment.¹¹⁶ I would thus argue that Achebe's novels could also have arisen for self assertion in response to Europe but it is an assertion made on behalf of the African (Igbo) society. In other words, the African novelist's assertion of 'I think therefore I am' is not individualistic like that of their European counterparts; it is communal. It was a necessary assertion made in the face of the dehumanising activities of colonialism, which Alastair Pennycook observes to be more acute in Africa than in Asia.¹¹⁷ It behoves that for what the novel arose to achieve in the African context, to wage an intellectual and ideological battle, it could only be a middle class venture as Obiechina pointed out in *Culture, Tradition and Society in the Western African Novel*.¹¹⁸ If there was any hope of a working class identifying with the novel, that hope daily wanes with today's economic realities in Nigeria to which the Igbo belong. In today's Nigeria, I would argue, most people are thinking of what to eat not what to read.

By 1965, Achebe acknowledged the fact that the novel was new to Africa and it was too soon to describe the relationship between the writers and the readers.¹¹⁹ He, however, went on in his essay, "The Novelist as Teacher", to show that many people

¹¹⁵ Watt, I, *Ibid.* p.15

¹¹⁶ Achebe, C, *Hopes and Impediments*, NY, Anchor Books Doubleday, 1989, p.53

¹¹⁷ Pennycook, Alastair, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*, London, Longman, 1994, p.89

¹¹⁸ Obiechina, *Ibid.* p.9

¹¹⁹ Achebe, C, *Hopes and Impediments (Selected Essays 1965 – 1987)*, Oxford, Heinemann, 1988, p.27

looked up to him as a teacher, some as a moral teacher who should write more of his kind of novels while some looked up to him as a school teacher who should include questions and answers at the back of his text to help them prepare for examinations.¹²⁰ In this observation, Achebe shows that African readers have always existed for the novels and he contests the idea of African writers writing only for European and American audiences. “What I do know is that they don’t have to. At least I know that I don’t have to.”¹²¹ But then in another essay, “Thoughts on the African Novel”, he writes:

At the root of all these strange and untidy thoughts lies a monumental historical fact, Europe – a presence which has obsessed us from Equiano to Ekwensi. For Equiano a preoccupation with Europe was inevitable....

In our own time a preoccupation with Europe has seemed almost equally inevitable despite the passage of nearly two hundred years. In the colonial period and its aftermath we were preoccupied with Europe in the form of protest.¹²²

Protest involves an ‘opposing point of view’, which Said has observed is the work of narrative to undertake. The reason for the opposition was to ‘rebuild the walls of Jerusalem’ and restore national dignity. In aiming at the cultural liberation of the Igbo, Gikandi argues that Achebe could not have started writing until he could locate himself “in a strategic linguistic and ideological position in relation to something else – an obscurant colonial condition.”¹²³ This is notwithstanding the fact that Achebe had objected in another essay, that he did not set about writing his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, “consciously in that solemn way....”.¹²⁴ Gikandi insists: “The narrative of liberation derives its power from the tradition it seeks to reject, revise, or appropriate and set in a different direction. Indeed, as Roland Barthes has observed, resisting the dominant tradition is an important precondition for modern literature.”¹²⁵ This is evident in the first two pages (if not the first paragraph) of *Things Fall Apart* where questions of African character, subjectivity, history and colonial modes of representation were addressed. For example, the dominant tradition in Achebe’s case

¹²⁰ Ibid. p.28

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid. p.63-64

¹²³ Gikandi, Ibid, p.25

¹²⁴ Achebe, C, “Named for Victoria, Queen of England”, in Ashcroft B et al (Eds) *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, Lon, Routledge, 1995, p.193

¹²⁵ Gikandi, Loc. Cit.

was a tradition that named an African, ‘Mr Johnson’ – as in Joyce Cary’s novel. That was an important precondition for starting his first novel with the name, *Okonkwo*. In other words, the false ‘I know my natives’ claim by the colonial administrator formed part of the ideological background as well as the foreground to Achebe’s writings. Such a claim meant the power to define the people; as I have argued above, the colonial definitions did more harm than good, so that Achebe said he “decided that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned”.¹²⁶

However, the narrative which Achebe and other novelists used to tell ‘our story’ encounters the problem of elitism and individualism. For instance, the parents who go into the bookshops to buy novels to keep their children busy during holidays are most likely middle class parents. The novels, among other reasons these parents might have, would help keep their children away from socializing with other children around them to maintain their elitist posture. This is the individualising effect of the novel in a society with a socio-political philosophy (*umunna wu ike*) that bestows absolute power and wisdom to the community. The individual in the pre-colonial arrangement is not separated from the community but the elitist mentality of the middle class, produced by colonialism, separates the individual from the community. This is the highlight of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2005), where the children of the Europeanized wealthy man are not allowed to socialize with others in their vicinity.¹²⁷ Igbo life, on the other hand, is communal and the people always want to socialize with each other and it remains the case that it is through socialization that culture is learnt.¹²⁸

Looking at the whole scenario more critically, one can agree that the novel with its individualizing effect would probably not be as effective as the dramatic medium in addressing such communal issues as colonialism and national politics. These were issues Achebe vigorously pursued in his novels, meaning that his works promoted the importance of community over individual interests, unlike the novels of Defoe and

¹²⁶ Achebe C, “Named for Victoria, Queen of England”, Op. Cit.

¹²⁷ Cf. Adichie, C N, *Purple Hibiscus*, London, Faber and Faber, 2005.

¹²⁸ Cf. Haralambos, M & Holborn, M (2004), *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives* (London, Harper & Collins, 6th Ed, p.ix) quoted by Ossie Enekwe, “Beyond Entertainment: A reflection on Drama and Theatre”, in Okagbue O (Ed), *African Performance Review* (Vol 3, No.1), London, Adonis and Abbey Pub, 2009, p.13

other Western novelists who were concerned about what Watt called 'economic individualism'.¹²⁹

Cognizance of the communal character of Igbo life, urbanisation notwithstanding, I thought theatre would complement the narrative efforts of the novelists in this whole process of redefinition, to restore the primacy of the community. The problem of individual primacy and its corruptive consequences in Igbo land today has reached a stage where as Franz Fanon might have observed, "It needed more than one native to say 'We've had enough'".¹³⁰ It is very clear that unless the whole people are involved as a community to say we have had enough, individual voices stand no chance of changing the status quo. Rather, such individual voices stand the chance of being ruthlessly drowned by the ruling class and used as examples to spread fear among the people. This is where dramatizing the novels can be very useful; for drama brings people together from time to time to share stories and it has the ability to incorporate those who cannot read.

There is a need to bring back the stories (that have travelled far and near) to the people as their own story. According to J Hillis Miller, as quoted by Hutcheon, "We need the same stories over and over, then, as one of the most powerful, perhaps the most powerful, of ways to assert the basic ideology of our culture."¹³¹ The Igbo basic ideology, which the oral tales propagate, is that the community is wiser and stronger than any individual. Achebe's novels simply recast this Igbo ideology, just as pointed out earlier in the Introduction.

One can argue that the heroes in his trilogy – *Things Fall Apart*, *No Longer at Ease* and *Arrow of God* – end up tragically because they walk in the opposite direction against their communities while Odili, the hero of *A Man of the People* survives because he ends up identifying himself with the people. The more I read Achebe's works, the more I am convinced that as far as he is concerned, the community's interest supersedes individual interest and his novels try to regenerate the collective will of the people. From this point of view, I consider stage adaptation a necessary stage which

¹²⁹ Watt, I, Ibid, p.63

¹³⁰ Fanon, F, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (Trans. Constance Farrington), Lon, Penguin Books, 1963, p.165

¹³¹ Hutcheon, Ibid, p.176

Achebe's novels should attain to fulfil the will of the author – communal engagement and redemption. For as Wole Soyinka has observed, drama, as an art form created and performed within a particular environment “naturally interacts with that environment, is influenced by it, influences that environment in turn and acts together with the environment in the larger and far more complex history of society.”¹³² This is what theatre or stage drama does that the novel is not capable of doing. Even though the novel has got its strengths, especially in its exploration of the consciousness of characters, and the theatre has got its own shortcomings, one thing is very clear: the stage gives life to imagined but representative stories. The stage, therefore, should be encouraged as a powerful means of telling the novel stories.

Below are the distinctions made between the narrative and dramatic form as observed by Milton E. Polsky in his book, *You Can Write a Play!*¹³³ I have organised the distinctions in a table format to help our understanding of what each literary medium has to offer.

NARRATIVE

A) Page:

Individual reads what is on page.
Tells what took place.
Sensory and emotional make-ups appeal to the imagination.
Writer in the writer-to-one-reader relationship appeals to the mind.
Readers can rest their mind, put a story down and reread passages.
A novel can take time to build up to an emotional peak.

B) Subjective:

Narrator tells what a character is thinking and feeling.

C) Past:

Novels are written in the past tense

D) Action:

Allows philosophical rambling and description of atmosphere, mood and inner conflict.

DRAMATIC

A) Stage:

Audience sees what is on stage.
Shows what is actually taking place.
Sensory and emotional makeups appeal directly to the senses.
Actor to audience relationship is a whole body-to-body phenomenon.
An audience cannot turn acts, scenes or beats back.
Emotional intensity is direct and immediate.

B) Objective:

Characters on stage reveal themselves through objective behaviour.

C) Present:

Plays are written in a perpetual present time.

D) Action:

Compact with clarity of circumstances and immediacy of the present.

¹³² Soyinka, W., “Theatre in African Traditional Cultures: Survival Patterns”, in Jeyifo B, *Modern African Drama (A Norton Critical Edition)*, NY/Lon, 2000, p. 421.

¹³³ Polsky E, *You can Write a Play*, NY, Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2002, pp.33 - 37

E) Place:

A number of places could be mentioned in reference to a single action

E) Place:

A number of places are unified into one through skilful exposition.

From Michael Fry's *Frontline Drama 4: Adapting Classics*,¹³⁴ more distinctions can also be made.

F) Private Experience

The novel is read at a chosen time and location and in any chosen posture
Reader's reactions and judgements are personal.

F) Communal Experience

Times locations and postures for theatre experiences are fixed and determined.

Audience members react together and others' judgements can affect individuals.

G) Presentation

One action at a time.

G) Presentation

Two actions can be dramatized simultaneously

It is also important to observe that drama is easily adaptable to different times and situations and is indeed so encouraged by theatre practitioners such as Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook. Otherwise, one would be in danger of practising what Brook refers to as 'deadly theatre' because a living theatre cannot afford to disregard any changes in society no matter how minute they appear.¹³⁵ Theatre, therefore, in my opinion, provides us the medium to keep pace with change while re-presenting social concerns to people because unlike the novel, it can adjust to different times and places and inject new life into old stories.

Choosing to Adapt *A Man of the People*

Achebe's concern about rediscovering social values did not end with his trilogy. The special character of the trilogy is that they are in direct confrontation with colonisation from its beginning to its supposed end. It is a 'supposed end' because the political independence from the colonial regime, which Achebe describes as "most unlucky",¹³⁶ was later to be discovered by the African writer as a complete hoax. Consequently, the work of the writer was not done yet because "he found himself with a new terrifying problem on his hands" – the emptiness of political independence and the will of the colonial master being propelled by a group of black stooges.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Fry, M (Intro), *Frontline Drama 4: Adapting Classics*, London, Methuen, 1996, ppxiv-xv

¹³⁵ Brook, P., *The Empty Space*, London, Penguin, 1968, p.19.

¹³⁶ Achebe, C, "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause", in *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, Ibid, p.118

¹³⁷ Ibid, p.119

For Ngugi, anyone who wishes to understand the literature written by Africans within the post-independence period must thoroughly read Fanon's chapter, "Pitfalls of National Consciousness" in *Wretched of the Earth*.¹³⁸ In this chapter, Fanon explains that the period preceding independence was filled with hope; general perception among the people was that their struggles would terminate colonial abuses like "forced labour, corporal punishment, inequality of salaries, limitation of political rights, etc."¹³⁹ However, as soon as independence was granted, the natives then realised that those who had been champions of freedom and embodiments of public aspirations were no more than egoists wishing to "become the president of profiteers."¹⁴⁰ In the case of Nigeria, James Booth recounts the personal ambitions of the first generation of Nigerian politicians. There was Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin of Sokoto and Premier of the North, who saw his post as a right and inwardly hated the idea of democracy which could bring to the northern council someone from a 'stranger infected' area. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo, Booth observed, were very much concerned with making themselves as wealthy as possible and then, only reach out to the less privileged in the manner of good Samaritans.¹⁴¹ One could argue that independence for Africa was like a vehicle separating the few indigenous bourgeoisie from the rest of their people, calling to mind George Orwell's *Animal Farm* where after the revolution, the rules changed to "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others".¹⁴² Ngugi observes that it was a period of disillusionment, which also engulfed the African writer.¹⁴³

The situation led to a break down in the relationship between the creative artist, who used his art to advance the call for self government, and the political nationalist who the artist began to perceive as having betrayed the cause. This betrayal, in Obiechina's words, "infused in the writers a certain radicalism as well as a sharpening of their social instincts",¹⁴⁴ which probably was the way of overcoming the disillusionment attendant

¹³⁸ Ngugi, *Writing Against Neocolonialism*, London, Vita Books, 1986, p8

¹³⁹ Fanon, *Ibid*, p.119

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p.133

¹⁴¹ Cf: Booth, J, *Writers and Politics in Nigeria*, NY, Africana Publishing Company, 1981, pp. 40-50

¹⁴² Orwell, G, *Animal Farm*, London, Penguin 2003 (first published by Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1945), p.97

¹⁴³ "Ngugi, *Ibid*, p.10

¹⁴⁴ Obiechina E N, *Language and Theme: Essays on African Literature*, *Ibid*, p.123

on the writers' psyche. Achebe's response to this situation was *A Man of the People*, just as other writers like Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah produced their own responses in *The Interpreters* (1965) and *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), respectively. These novels more than anything else expose the corrupt politicians of the new nations in the post-independence era, like Chief Nanga, sarcastically named 'a man of the people'. Obiechina observes that these novels accuse the post-independence African elites of

expropriating from the masses the fruits of independence, and more specifically, of being venal, corrupt, irresponsible, hypocritical, and without vision and common sense. The failure of independence is regarded as evidence of the failure of the elite to justify themselves to the masses and validate their claim to leadership.¹⁴⁵

The political rulers were not only to blame for the failed post-independence Africa. The intellectuals also had their own blame for not awakening the people to understand the new post-colonial nation-states and participate actively in it. Fanon's assessment of the native intellectual of this period in his treatise on *National Culture* is that they pass through three phases. In the first phase, having assimilated European culture, they are inspired by Europe and they always want to prove this through their writings, behaviour and detachment from their people. In the second phase, the intellectual is disturbed as he remembers who he is, leading to the third phase when he decides to fight and awaken the people.¹⁴⁶ Maja-Pearce Adewale implies that most of our intellectuals of the post-independence period had not attained the third phase when he argues that critics of this novel, *A Man of the People*, neglect "the intellectual failure of the educated elite who, with one or two exceptions, proved themselves unable or unwilling to respond in any profound sense to the demands of the time".¹⁴⁷

I would argue that the redolence of post-independence political corruption, apparently, has lingered because corruption appears to be the most identifiable mark of Nigerian politics even into the twenty-first century. Considering the low interest in reading the novels, I reasoned that it is possible that in this century, many could be wondering

¹⁴⁵ Loc. Cit.

¹⁴⁶ Fanon, F, Ibid, pp178-179

¹⁴⁷ Adewale, M P, Ibid, p.35

where it all began. Choosing *A Man of the People* among other novels for the stage, I am suggesting that we can examine our political history to see how it all began, hoping that this effort will help in creating the awareness that the novels contain stories that can assist us in tracing the origin of today's socio-political problems and cultural degeneration. *A Man of the People*, in my opinion, speaks directly to the Igbo politician and his participation in Nigerian politics. Even though it was published in 1966 I chose to adapt it for a twenty-first century audience because its contemporary relevance could not be questioned.

Contemporary Relevance

To carry out this research, I read a number of novels to decide which would be most appropriate for dramatization. Among the novels I read were *Omenūko* by Pita Nwana, *Anthills of the Savannah* and *A Man of the People*, both written by Chinua Achebe. At first, I was attracted to *Omenūko* because it is a novel that speaks to the Igbo man about the strength of the community which works through consultation (*igba izu*) and reminds him that he cannot run away from his people after committing evil against them and be at peace. However, I rejected *Omenūko* because of the language problem it might create since this research programme is English-language based. The novel was written in Igbo. I could not use *Anthills of the Savannah* because its world is governed by the military; and as what I take as the public pulse in Nigeria suggests, military rule is no longer fashionable. I then decided to work with *A Man of the People* because of its relevance to the current Nigerian political climate with which I am concerned here.

As far back as 1983 when Chinua Achebe wrote *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he observed aptly that the country's political misery had made it impossible for two Nigerians to meet without 'sliding' "into a litany of our national deficiencies"¹⁴⁸. By 2004, when I applied for this research programme, the litany of national deficiencies seemed to me to have increased, making the future look even bleaker. It was no longer a matter of sliding into a litany of our deficiencies; people seemed to me to already been consumed by those deficiencies. In 2004, a ten year old boy captured the despondent feelings of most helpless Nigerians when he wrote to *World Igbo Times*, "If I see God, I will ask

¹⁴⁸ Chinua C, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Oxford, Heinemann, 2003, p.2

him why he made me to become a Nigerian....”¹⁴⁹ In fact, earlier than that, by the year 2000, a foreign observer, Karl Maier, wrote a book using a saying from Achebe “*This House has Fallen*” as his title to describe the state of Nigeria. This work was written during the reign of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former military dictator (1976-1979) who was reincarnated in politics as a civilian. One of the greatest highlights of Olusegun Obasanjo’s regime, which many Nigerians nicknamed ‘dictatorial democracy’, seemed to have culminated in his rigging the 2003 elections to gain his second term as a civilian president. In his book titled, *After The Madness Called Election 2003*, John Odey asserts that “Obasanjo and his supporters deceived all of us when they said that the so-called elections of April and May 2003 were peaceful, free and fair”.¹⁵⁰ It seemed to me that the election rigging of 2003 was the beginning of what I consider his dictatorship. He used thugs to destroy even government properties in states where he was not allowed to have his way. Incidentally, his destructive activities included Achebe’s home State of Anambra for which Achebe rejected the national award of “Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic (CFR)” in 2004. In his rejection letter, Achebe wrote:

I write this letter with a very heavy heart. For some time now I have watched events in Nigeria with alarm and dismay. I have watched particularly the chaos in my own state of Anambra where a small clique of renegades, openly boasting its connections in high places, seems determined to turn my homeland into a bankrupt and lawless fiefdom. I am appalled by the brazenness of this clique and the silence, if not connivance, of the Presidency.... “Nigeria’s condition today under your watch is, however, too dangerous for silence. I must register my disappointment and protest by declining to accept the high honour awarded me in the 2004 Honors List”.¹⁵¹

The events in the country therefore convinced me that his establishment of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was to terrorize anyone who disagreed with him, in the name of fighting corruption. One of those areas of

¹⁴⁹ Obiukwu C, in Anyanwu C (ed), *World Igbo Times*, Issue 6, Vol.2, 2004, p.24

¹⁵⁰ Odey, J O, *After the Madness Called Election 2003*, Enugu, Snaap Press, 2003, p11

¹⁵¹ Akinola W & Nwokocha J, “Chinua Achebe to Obasanjo: Keep Your CFR award: ‘Nigeria’s Condition under Your Watch is too Dangerous for Silence’” in Vanguard, Lagos, Saturday, October 16, 2004.

disagreement with the public was his campaign to become a life President¹⁵², which was presented as ‘Third Term’ to Nigerians. After the Senate rejected the ‘Third Term’ bid, he publicly declared during the election campaigns that the 2007 elections would be ‘a do or die’ affair.¹⁵³ From ‘a do or die affair’ emerged President Musa Yar’Adua, whose health is fragile. The manner of the rigging and the level of violence at the 2007 elections created legitimate fear among many concerned citizens that ‘winners’ in subsequent elections are probably going to be announced, as Mohammadu Buhari observed, twenty-four hours before the people get to the polls.¹⁵⁴ According to Wole Soyinka

Obasanjo inflicted a wound on democracy in this nation which will take years to heal... He was the most blatant rubbisher (sic) of the judiciary... he ruled outside the law... he is responsible for certain military excesses... he encouraged police brutality.... He consecrated thugs, danced with thugs and praised known thugs. He handed over states to thugs. He must be put on public trial.¹⁵⁵

Looking at Nigeria before and during Obasanjo’s regime, one could clearly see the events of the novel, *A Man of the People*, replayed in real life. For Achebe himself, Obasanjo took the country to its lowest level – “as low as she has ever gone”¹⁵⁶ while the former leader of Nigerian Labour Congress and current governor of Edo state, Adams Oshiomhole, branded Obasanjo “a national mistake” who “came aboard the Nigerian vehicle and put it in the reverse gear.”¹⁵⁷ From a personal point of view, before the above quotations appeared on the pages of Nigerian newspapers, I saw in Olusegun Obasanjo, the trickster, the clownish but utterly unscrupulous and wicked character of Chief Nanga. Newspaper reports even claimed that Obasanjo slept with his

¹⁵² Ofonagoro, W, “Obasanjo Wanted 24 Years” *This Day* (<http://odili.net/news/source/2008/jun/8/500.html>), Sunday, June 8, 2008

¹⁵³ One of Olusegun Obasanjo’s most unpopular statements. (cf. Onmonya G, ‘What Next after the Do-or – Die Elections’, <http://www.nigeriavillagesquare.com/articles/george-onmonya/what-next-after-the-do-or-die-elec.html> Friday, 04 May 2007).

¹⁵⁴ Nosike Ogbuenyi and Chinyere Okoye, “Buhari Seeks Halt to Inauguration”, in *This Day* (<http://odili.net/news/source/2007/may/1/210.html>) Tuesday, May 1, 2007

¹⁵⁵ Soyinka, W, “Obasanjo is a Political Robber” in *Daily Sun*, (<http://odili.net/news/source/2009/jan/3/508.html>) Saturday, January 3, 2009

¹⁵⁶ Achebe, C, “Obasanjo has taken Nigeria to Lowest Level”, in *Vanguard* (<http://odili.net/news/source/2007/apr/3/320.html>) Tuesday, April 3, 2007

¹⁵⁷ Oshiomhole, A, “Obasanjo a National Mistake” in *Daily Independent*, (<http://odili.net/news/source/2008/jan/22/710.html>) Tuesday, January 22, 2008

son's wife, Mojisola Obasanjo to award her contracts¹⁵⁸, just as Chief Nanga slept with Elsie, the girlfriend of Odili. With the numerous reported atrocities of Obasanjo's government, I thought performing *A Man of the People* could not have come at a better time in the political history of Nigeria.

A Man of the People was published in 1966 to observe the bad and corrupt leadership in post independence Nigeria, warning against military intervention, which eventually occurred a few days after the publication of the novel. However, my argument is that the novel remains even more relevant to our society in the twenty-first century because collective amnesia has become a major flaw in our society. Maier rightly observes in *This House Has Fallen* that "The tragedy of the future is that Nigerians refuse to learn from their past".¹⁵⁹ Ironically, the same people who would always quip, 'this country, *na wa o*',¹⁶⁰ to indicate their frustration that things are not getting better, are also always quick to brand those who try to recall the past as 'retrogressive' or 'non-progressive'. It is for such people (and they might seem to make up the greater percentage of Nigerian population) that Achebe wrote:

I have no doubt that there will be some inclined to the view that it were better to forget the agonies of that past and turn the mind to the marvellous achievements of "reconciliation, rehabilitation, and reconstruction." I do not agree. I believe that in our situation the greater danger lies not in remembering but in forgetting, in pretending that slogans are the same as truth; and I believe that Nigeria, always prone to self-deception, stands in great need of reminders.¹⁶¹

There is need to remind ourselves that the abuse of democracy provided the military with the impetus to take over government. There are many who will have read the novel but have forgotten and there are many others who have no knowledge of this prophetic work. My adaptation is intended to serve both groups as a reminder and as enlightenment about the nature of corruption in Nigerian politics and its possible consequences. It is also important to observe that *A Man of the People* is not only about

¹⁵⁸ "Treasonable Sex", in *Daily Sun* (<http://odili.net/news/source/2008/jan/13/508.html>) Sunday, January 13, 2008

¹⁵⁹ Maier, K, *This House has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*, London, Penguin, 2000, p.287

¹⁶⁰ An expression of frustration or surprise.

¹⁶¹ Achebe, C, *Morning Yet on Creation Day*, NY, Anchor Books, 1976, pxiii

corrupt politicians but also an indictment of the intellectuals who should have risen to the challenge of public enlightenment.

Chapter Two

KINGDOM OF THE MASK THE ADAPTATION SCRIPT (FINAL DRAFT)

Characters

Odili	Teacher / Politician
Chief Nanga	Minister of Culture
Mrs Nanga	Chief Nanga's wife
Edna	Nanga's Fiancée
Mr Samalu	Odili's Father
Max	Leader of Common People's Convention (CPC)
Eunice	Max's Fiancée & CPC Member
Elsie	Odili's Girlfriend
Chief Koko	Minister for Overseas Training
Doctor	
Nurse	
Sergeant	Police Officers
Corporal	
Jalio	Writer
Principal	
Rafi	CPC Members
Joe	
Mr Odo	Edna's Father
Josiah	Ostracized Shopkeeper / Nanga's Thug
Boniface	Thugs
Dogo	
Other Thugs	
Ex-Policeman	
Bailiff	
Messenger	
Town Crier / Announcer	
Maskers	
Dancers	
Four Village Youths	
Villagers / Crowd	

Prologue

Choreographed dance with masks.

Song: (Humming)

I marala m

Do you know me...

I marala m

Do you know me...

I marala onye m bu?

Do you really know who I am?

PRESENT

ACT ONE

Scene 1

Evening, Saturday. Hospital.

Odili is lying on a bed. Mr Samalu sits next to him. Enter two Policemen carrying weapons that include two double barrels, five matchetes and two bottles. They drop them front stage guided by one police officer while the other goes out and returns with two files. He hands over one file to his colleague.

MR SAMALU: What is happening? Sergeant!

SERGEANT: No interfere with gov'ment business! (*Tries to handcuff Odili*) Mr Odili Samalu, you are under arrest!

MR SAMALU: Doctor! Doctor, oh!

Doctor enters.

DOCTOR: Officer! What is the problem? Come and talk to me(*takes the officer away from the bed while the other officer stays put watching the Nurse treat Odili*) he is unconscious. What is the problem?

SERGEANT: Co'cious no co'cious *na* your business, doctor. Our own *na* to arrest him.

DOCTOR: For what?

SERGEANT: Him go disrupt Chief Nanga's political rally.

DOCTOR: And what about those who beat him into coma? Have you arrested them? I think this country is sick.

SERGEANT: (*Pointing to the weapons*) See dangerous weapons wey we find for him car, you dey here dey blow big grammar. In fact, this man, *na* hardened criminal.

MR SAMALU: My son is not a criminal.

SERGEANT: Copra! Read the charges!

CORPORAL: (*Reads from a file*) "On leaving Chief Nanga's house, that you, Mr Odili Samalu, on that same day you insulted the aforementioned Chief, Saturday, 12 December 1964, went and deceived a new political party, Common People's Convention, using their name to engage in illegal political activities".

DOCTOR: How?

SERGEANT: You *dey* ask me? (*Looks at Mr Samalu*) That one *no be* crime?

MR SAMALU: I am sure my son did everything he was supposed to do.

SERGEANT: Copra, go on!

CORPORAL: “That you, Mr Odili Samalu, on this day, Saturday, 9 January 1965, went uninvited and disrupted Chief Micah A Nanga’s political rally in his home town, Anata. That you insulted the aforementioned Chief, the Honourable Minister for Culture, before all his people, calling him a liar.” (*Closes the file and salutes Sergeant*).

DOCTOR: Officer, we can sort everything out. Just be patient, I will tell you when he is conscious enough to give a statement. (*The police officers appear uncompromising*) Okay? Please.

SERGEANT: (*Taking the weapons away*) Make you no think say we don go. We go stay around dey watch am.

(*Police officers exit*).

MR SAMALU: Thank you Doctor.

DOCTOR: It’s all right, Mr Samalu. (*Checks Odili*)

MR SAMALU: How is he doing?

DOCTOR: He’s fine, sir. It may take two to three days for him to regain full consciousness.

Edna enters. She is carrying a wound at the back of her elbow.

DOCTOR: The casualty ward is in the opposite room.

EDNA: I know, sir. I’ve come to see Odili.

DOCTOR: Okay, but make sure you get yourself straight to casualty.

Nurse enters.

NURSE: Doctor, there are more victims from the election campaign coming in.

DOCTOR: I’ll be back soon, Mr Samalu.

Nurse and Doctor run out.

EDNA: Good evening sir. I’m Odili’s friend.

MR SAMALU: Does my daughter have a name?

EDNA: My name is Edna, sir.

MR SAMALU: (*Sighs*) Thank you for coming. You are the first of Odili’s friends that has come to visit him, since... (*gets emotional*).

EDNA: Papa, it will be all right. Please, Papa... (*holds Odili’s hand*).

MR SAMALU: Were you at the rally?

EDNA: Yes, sir.

MR SAMALU: What happened?

Edna and Mr Samalu freeze. Odili lifts his head and appears awake. Lights out or blurry light. Odili speaks (while they – Odili, Edna and Mr Samalu – prepare for the next scene).

ODILI: Let me tell my story. Please don’t be afraid. I’m not ghosting. I am still unconscious. But it is very necessary that I must tell you my story. In case I don’t ever wake up, please, will you tell Edna and tell my father, that it all began the day Chief Nanga came to visit Anata Grammar School....

MEMORY

Act 1: Scene 2

Before midday. Anata Grammar School.

MR SAMALU: Ladies and gentlemen. As the local chairman of the People's Organisational Party, it is my honour to welcome Chief the Honourable, M. A. Nanga, Minister of Culture! Nnukwu Mmanwu – the great masquerade! A man of the People!!

(Gunshots! Drums! Gong! Ululation! Dance!)

(A poster hangs on Stage "ANATA GRAMMAR SCHOOL welcomes Honourable Chief M A NANGA". A Masquerade appears with a comic dance leading Nanga and his entourage, including Edna and Principal of Anata Grammar School, onto the stage. Then, a dance group performs around the Masquerade. Odili stands by the side continuing his narration from the last scene using a voice-over technique).

ODILI: *(Commentary continued)* Villagers were dancing themselves lame for a very corrupt Minister who led a pack of hounds against honest and more educated politicians in the Parliament in his quest for a ministerial portfolio.

Mr Samalu pushes Odili forward to greet Chief Nanga.

ODILI: *(Glances at his father. Greets Nanga respectfully)* You are welcome, Chief.

NANGA: I know this fellow. Is this not Odili?

MR SAMALU: Yes, Chief, this is my son/

PRINCIPAL: And one of my teachers.

MR SAMALU: ...your old student/

NANGA: *(Excited. Hugs Odili)* Odili the great! Yes, he was my most brilliant boy. I taught him in Standard Three, you see! Odili the great! What are you doing here?

ODILI: Teaching.

NANGA: Wonderful! Teaching is a noble profession. But you should come and take up a strategic post in Lagos. We shouldn't leave everything for the highland people. We must press for our fair share of the national cake, you see.

MR SAMALU: I think he will be happy to come, Chief. He is a university graduate.

NANGA: You have been to University? I said it. *(Addressing his entourage)* I always said to other boys that he will go to University. He never forgets any lesson you teach him. No be so, Odili?

ODILI: *(smiles in approval).*

NANGA: *(Back to Odili)* And I still remember your mates' slogan: 'Odili has the last laugh' *(he laughs loudly)*. But why haven't you called on me since you graduated?

ODILI: As a Minister, you must be very busy. Moreover, I am applying for postgraduate scholarship, first, before I start applying for federal appointments.

NANGA: Ah, Minister *na* servant. To serve people like you, you see? You will come to Lagos and we will see to your postgraduate scholarship...to England or even America our new friends.... They are awarding me Doctor of Law, LLD next month.

ODILI: Congratulations, sir! You deserve it.

Everyone around expresses 'Congratulations!' in different ways.

MALE DANCER: (*Prances with dance steps*) Eeh! O bukwa nu Chief, buru Honourable burukwa Doctor ooo!

ODILI: (*Speaks to Edna*) Hello. I'm Odili.

EDNA: Edna.

ODILI: You are Chief's daughter?

EDNA: (*Shakes her head and turns away*).

ODILI: Can I... (*Edna moves the other side of Chief Nanga*).

NANGA: (*Addresses his hosts*) Thank you ladies and gentlemen for this sumptuous and rapturous reception. (*Applause*). Yes, splendid indeed, splendid! This visit is just a family re-union; you know, I have not come to ask for your votes (*laughter*) – there is no election. I will continue to do my best for you in Lagos, because I insist that our people must press for their fair share of the national cake. I assure you that I will leave no stone unturned to find every crumb that belongs to us. Thank you. (*Applause*).

The dancers entertain as people congratulate Chief Nanga.

NANGA: (*Turns to Odili*) Make you come Lagos this Christmas holidays o; otherwise I go send police to bring you. When you come, I will take you to my friend Chief Koko, Honourable Minister for Overseas Training, make we see if something is going. (*He laughs*).

ODILI: No problem Chief. I will be there. Thank you, Chief.

MR SAMALU: Thank you very much, Chief.

NANGA: (*Shaking hands with the principal*) The honourable principal! Thank you, sir, for this wonderful reception.

PRINCIPAL: Oh, his honourable, I should be the one saying 'thank you sir'!

NANGA: No, no, no, no! You all know my motto: 'Do the right thing and shame the devil.' (*Applause*). Minister or no Minister, I must respect my elders. Is that not our culture? Am I not the minister for culture? (*Laughter*).

ALL: (*As in a chorus*) You are!

NANGA: Ahaa! I have to teach by example.

PRINCIPAL: Thank you for coming to visit your people, especially, Anata Grammar School.

NANGA: Minister or no Minister, I am a son of Anata! No be so?

ALL: (*As in a chorus*) Na so!

NANGA: Ahaa! You don't forget where you home (*the masquerade performs a comic dance and leads Nanga and his entourage out*).

(Exit all except Odili and Mr Samalu).

MR SAMALU: You see? I told you. Chief Nanga is a very good man.

ODILI: I told you, I don't like this man.

MR SAMALU: Who do you like, Odili? Is it me? Is it your brothers or your sisters? No body. Tell yourself the truth, it's only yourself that you like.

ODILI: I know how he became a Minister. It was very shameful.

MR SAMALU: That knowledge that holds you down is not good knowledge. You must go to Lagos and let Chief find you a better job.

ODILI: I will go to Lagos but I am only interested in postgraduate scholarship.

MR SAMALU: What is the use going to school when the less educated are ruling and have all the money?

ODILI: I prefer knowledge to money.

MR SAMALU: Rubbish! (*Walking away*) You will eat book. And what have you achieved with all the knowledge you have gathered from school?

ODILI: I am teaching others.

Mr Samalu exits.

Act 1: Scene 3

ODILI (Commentary): In the evening of that first day in Lagos, Chief Nanga took me to the Minister for Overseas Training, Chief Koko, to negotiate my postgraduate scholarship. I was well impressed with how quick he tackled an issue as personal as this. But at Chief Koko's house, it was comedy.

Saturday Evening. Lagos. Chief Koko's house.

Chief Koko walks towards the door. Enter Nanga and Odili.

NANGA: (*with excitement as he shakes Koko*) Chief the Honourable Simon Koko!

KOKO: Animal in the shooting...

KOKO & NANGA: (*Chorus*) ...eating in progress! (*They shake hands again and laugh like jesters. Odili stands looking at them. After laughing, Nanga introduces Odili.*)

NANGA: This is my boy, Odili. I asked him to come and spend his holidays with me. He is a university graduate but I laid the foundation. I taught him in Standard Three.

(Enter Chief Koko's steward. He puts down a cup of coffee on side table beside Chief Koko's seat and exits).

KOKO: Welcome, gentleman.

ODILI: Thank you, sir.

KOKO: Have seat. (*They all sit down. Looking at Nanga*). What is going for you my man? Tea or coffee?

NANGA: (*Laughs comically again*). Oyibo! Tea, coffee, me I no follow you black-white men for that. Na whisky I go take. Odili, I hope you dey for my side?

ODILI: No problem, sir.

KOKO: (*He serves them whisky; takes a sip from his cup of coffee. Then begins to wiggle his body in discomfort*). M. A., they have killed me!

NANGA: (*Springs up*) What?

KOKO: (*Almost crying*) They have poisoned my coffee o! What did I do to anybody? Call the cook! Call the cook! What wrong have I done they want my life? O my God!

NANGA: *(Clearly confused)* Steward! Steward! *(He rushes to the telephone and dials).* This is Chief the Honourable Nanga, Minister of Culture....I said this is the Minister for Culture of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and you are there asking me question. Where is the doctor/

KOKO: What's the need for doctor? What do they know about African poison?

NANGA... I said I want to speak to the doctor. Take it easy for what? My friend, the Minister for Overseas Training, is dying, you say I should take it easy....Okay, I will deal with you *(bangs the phone. He rushes out calling out to the steward while Odili is standing beside Chief Koko comforting him. Chief Nanga rushes back to the stage. Behind him comes the Steward).*

KOKO: *(At the sight of the steward springs to attack him but Odili and Nanga restrain him).* You poisoned my coffee! After everything I've done for you? You ungrateful idiot! I am going to kill you before I die!

STEWARD: *(Taken aback and frightened)* Me? Poison Master? *(Shrugs)* Nevertheless! *(Moves swiftly and grabs the cup of coffee and drinks all of it. Everyone is shocked into silence as the Steward looks around in affirmation of his claim).* How I go poison master? My head no correct? Nevertheless me for poison master. Na because I no remember for time say master coffee finish; na im make I rush buy our homemade coffee make master manage for this night.

KOKO: Why you no tell me say na homemade. I dey drink homemade?

STEWARD: As gor'ment say make everybody dey drink homemade, I no sabi say e go burn master belle. Sorry, master.

KOKO: Sorry yourself. Carry yourself commot here!

Exit the cook with the teacup and saucer.

NANGA: *(Bursts into laughter).* Nwoke m, na so you dey fear death?

KOKO: You *nko*? If na you, you no go shit for trouser?

(Nanga begins to mimic Koko wriggling his body and saying "they have killed me o!" etc. Koko in turn goes to the telephone and mimics Nanga saying "This is the Minister of Culture for the Federal Republic of Nigeria!" After, they both burst into laughter. Odili tries to avoid eye contact with any of them, remaining immune to their laughter).

CHOREOGRAPHED MOVEMENT OF MASKERS USING THEME MUSIC. ODILI NARRATES OVER THE MUSIC AND MOVEMENTS

ODILI (Commentary): It was funny and it was not funny. My scholarship was not even mentioned. All my host could tell me was to run away if some came to make me a minister. What would I be running away from? The cosy abode, the posh Cadillac? I wondered where I would be running to. Back into the rain? My father had said a long time ago: "It is only a fool that spits out the juicy morsel that good fortune has placed in his mouth." I did not believe him then. But then, I wanted to enjoy the juicy morsel in my mouth to the fullest. I asked Chief if I could bring my girl friend, Elsie, to spend the weekend with me. He happily agreed.

Act 1: Scene 4

Odili visits Elsie

Tuesday Afternoon. Hospital Restaurant.

Odili is seated waiting for Elsie. The Restaurant attendant enters and informs him that Elsie is on her way.

Enter Elsie:

ELSIE: *(Excited)* Odii boy!

ODILI: Elsie! Elsie! *(Rises with excitement and they hug passionately, spinning round).*

ELSIE: When did you arrive Lagos? I have been expecting you!

ODILI: Saturday morning.

ELSIE: Since Saturday!? This is Tuesday, Odili.

ODILI: Do you know what?

ELSIE: I am staying with the Minister of Culture, Chief Nanga.

ELSIE: Are you serious? Don't tell me you came with that car outside.

ODILI: That's his Cadillac.

ELSIE: Is that the famous Cadillac? I don't think I have even seen it before. Odili, you dey enjoy o! How manage?

ODILI: Na the man invite me. He didn't know I had plans to come to Lagos. So, make I just follow them enjoy small.

ELSIE: Abi? If you can't beat them...

ODILI: Well, what can I do? As it stands now in this country, it not *what* you know but *who* you know that matters.

ELSIE: *(Goes and buys drink for Odili and herself).* You think say these people go go another heaven after this?

ODILI: My sister, me, I no sabi o! I think they had better not go because it will be divine injustice.

ELSIE: Let's go on a ride, Odili. I need my own share of this government.

ODILI: By sitting inside the car?

ELSIE: Of course? I want to sit inside that car and cross my legs and...and *(lowers her voice)* kiss you and...*(softly runs her fingers down Odili's cheeks)* touch you and...

(They gaze at each other silently. They hold their hands across the table. Then Elsie goes over to Odili and rests her head on his shoulder).

ELSIE: Let's find somewhere private. I have missed you so much.

ODILI: I missed you too. But I promised Chief I will not be long. He might need the car soon.

ELSIE: *(Disappointed)* But that car is our money, Odili. Don't you think so?

ODILI: Well...in a way, not far from the truth.

ELSIE: Mmh, you shouldn't deny me my own chance to enjoy it. Or maybe, you haven't been missing me.

ODILI: And why have I come to spend my Christmas in Lagos when everyone is travelling back to the village?

ELSIE: But we won't be long. Am working tonight.

ODILI: And what's the need if we won't be long. *(Pause)* Anyway, I have good news for you. You will have full chance to enjoy the car and enjoy Odili. Chief says he doesn't mind if you come and stay with me for the weekend.

ELSIE: *(Surprised and excited).* Are you sure?

ODILI: *(Smiles)* Then we can be long.

ODILI: It is at Chief's house that you can have your own share of the country's wealth, not sitting in a car. In his house, you can enjoy our European heritage, ten times better than any private place, I tell you.

ELSIE: *(Fully excited)* I can't wait!

ODILI: I am no longer in the waiting list. At least make we follow them enjoy small.

ELSIE: Abi? And it came at the right time. Am off-duty from Thursday to Sunday.

ODILI: But Chief also wants his own.... You need to arrange.

ELSIE: Ah ah! No big deal. His wife, nko?

ODILI: Mrs Nanga and the children just travelled yesterday to the village for Christmas.

ELSIE: Ah, so na we dey in charge. Don't worry.

ODILI: Make you find better girl o. Make him no begin dey eye you.

ELSIE: What is an old man eyeing me for?

ODILI: For the same reason you are arranging a young woman for him?

ELSIE: You, Mr Jealous. You are already afraid of an old man. Can he last?

ODILI: I am not Mrs Nanga to answer that. But he is paying for a second wife, much younger than you. You better know that.

ELSIE: We know this is the world of men.

ODILI: Men of money and power, I suppose.

ELSIE: Sixty year old man, sixteen year old girl. Never the reverse.

ODILI: What of sugar mums?

ELSIE: And sugar daddies. This is not about sugar anything: this is about marriage. Men are always cheating us.

ODILI: What about women who dump their lovers for money and power? Money and power cheat you while you cheat the less rich.

ELSIE: Well, good luck to your friend Minister and his new girl. It's none of our business.

ODILI: I hope. (*On his feet to go*)

ELSIE: You hope? Make you shine your eyes o, this one you dey hope.

ODILI: (*Mimes rubbing his eyes*) I don shine them proper. I can now see tomorrow.

ELSIE: So what do you see? It could become your business?

ODILI: As much as you hope it could become your business.

ELSIE: Why should it be?

ODILI: Ooh! That's the question: why should it become my business, our business?

ELSIE: Na you sabi.

ODILI: Anyway, our business is to make sure there is a charming gazelle for the Honourable Minister this weekend. Make sure you don't disappoint. He must be distracted. Period.

ELSIE: Don't worry! Trust me.

ODILI: As always.

ELSIE: I can't wait! I missed you so much (*steals a kiss*). When I come there, I will just lie on the bed, for breakfast, for launch, for supper. Whenever I want to bath, you'll carry me to the bath and wash me and dry me, and carry me back to bed and/

ODILI: Just say it and it will be done!

They hug and hold each other passionately while walking out.

Odili and Elsie exit.

***CHOREOGRAPHED MOVEMENT OF MASKERS USING THEME MUSIC.
ODILI NARRATES OVER THE MUSIC AND MOVEMENTS***

ODILI: (Commentary) Friday afternoon, I went with the driver to pick Elsie and the girl for Chief Nanga so that we could all form the Minister's entourage for a Book Exhibition. A feeling of self importance was building up in my system.

Act 1: Scene 5

Friday afternoon. Chief Nanga's Living Room.

The house is bright. Nanga's picture and other family pictures are hanging on the wall. On the corner, there is a staircase leading to Chief Nanga's room. Chief Nanga is standing with a briefcase looking at his watch as Odili enters with Elsie.

NANGA: Oh good, you are back.

ODILI: Sorry, Honourable, there was too much traffic.

NANGA: I was saying make una no make me go late for this thing o. But thank God you are back, just on time.

ODILI: Chief, this is Elsie I told you about: my friend from the university days.

NANGA: Elsie, I have heard so much about you. How are you?

ELSIE: (*With bended knee*) Fine, sir!

NANGA: Please sit down. I hear you're a nurse at the General Hospital?

ELSIE: Yes, sir.

ODILI: (*To Elsie*) My dear Elsie, Chief Nanga, the Honourable Minister of Culture, needs no introduction.

ELSIE: Of course, not. He's admired by many.

NANGA: (*Laughs widely*). I hope that's a compliment. (*to Elsie*) Odili was my best pupil when I taught them in Standard Three. I used to call him 'Odili the Great'. We re-united when I visited my village grammar school where he is teaching, and I invited him to Lagos so that we can see how to help him do even better.

ELSIE: Very kind of you, sir.

NANGA: No, no, no...Odili is my boy: his welfare concerns me too. When he asked if you could come and spend the weekend with us, I said, why not?

ELSIE: Thank you, sir.

NANGA: Odili, why don't you arrange a quick drink?

ODILI: (*Goes for the brandy*) Chief is a very busy man. He rarely has time to eat or to look after his family.

NANGA: If somebody wan make you minister, make you run; make you no 'gree. This no be good life.

ELSIE: Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

NANGA: Na true word my sister.

ODILI: (*Offering the drinks*) Chief is going to open a book exhibition in the next (*glances at his watch*) thirty minutes. So we are going there once you drop your bag.

ELSIE: Book Exhibition? How them dey do that one?

NANGA: Make you ask them o, my sister. All I hear be say Minister of Culture suppose dey there. I no fit say no. Minister na public football; wherever they kick you, you go land there, *gbozaa* (*demonstrates the landing causing Odili and Elsie to laugh*). Why you no bring your friend for me now. Two be pair, But three... ah. The equation no balance o o.

ELSIE: Am sorry, sir. She fell sick this morning.

NANGA: That's alright, that's alright. Man proposes, God deposes. Life no dey go as you plan, eh, Odili?

ODILI: You are right, Chief. Life can change so quickly.

NANGA: Anyway, we should be going. (*Gives a card to Odili*) That's the IV. (*Calls the steward*) Dogo! Dogo!

Dogo Enters.

NANGA: Show her my wife's room. (*Pats Elsie on the shoulder with a suggestive smile*) You can take my wife's place, ha ha ha.... Make yourself comfortable. (*He waves his hand comically towards Elsie. Elsie looks at Odili with surprise*).

(*Odili stares at him as Dogo takes Elsie's bag from her and leads her out*).

CHIEF NANGA: (*Lowers his voice*) This Elsie, who is she? Your future wife or ...something...?

ODILI: No... just a friend.

NANGA: Oh, I see.

ODILI: Shouldn't she be staying in my room?

NANGA: (*Shakes his head*) Better in my wife's room. Don't want tongues wagging, if you know what I mean. Later in the night you can...(he winks at Odili and they both smile. Re-enter Elsie). Are you ready?

ELSIE: Well...erm.../

NANGA: You didn't do your painting and all the *orishi-rishi*...woman ritual...you know what I mean? (*They all laugh*). Na special ceremony o: book exhibition!

ELSIE: I was thinking...like you said...just to balance the equation (*laughs*), let me stay behind.

ODILI: Ah! Won't you like to meet Jalio? (*Taps the card*). He's President of the Association organising the book launch.

ELSIE: Jalio? That used to dress funny in the Uni?

NANGA: Funny, how? I hope he is not irresponsible.

ODILI: Not 'irresponsible'. Just well...(gropes for the word) strange. You know looks can be deceptive. Some creative people are like that. He is a good guy. He wrote *Song of the Blackbird*/

ELSIE: Ah! *Song of the Blackbird*.

NANGA: Oh! A mad musician!

ELSIE: (*Laughs*) *Song of a Blackbird* is a novel. Very popular, Chief.

NANGA: Musician oo... novel writer oo... Can't stand irresponsible dressing.

ELSIE: (*To Odili*) You go along with Chief. I'll read a novel and wait.

NANGA: Okay. Anything to please a woman. (*checks his briefcase*) My speech. Where is it? (*They look for it in vain*) Odili, make you go check if any blue file dey for my room, upstairs, please. It must be inside it.

(*Odili goes to look for the file. Nanga quickly steals a kiss from Elsie and whispers to her. Odili nearly catches them. Nanga opens his briefcase in search of the speech as Odili re-enters. Odili looks at him and Elsie with some amount of suspicion*).

ODILI: I didn't see anything, Chief.

NANGA: And where is it? Oh, thank goodness, it is inside here. (*He brings it out of his briefcase and opens it*). I must rehearse.

ODILI: Are we not running late, with traffic and all that...?

NANGA: No be Africa we dey? The people go wait until Minister come, otherwise their launching no go shine. (*Reflects*) Abi you say this Jalio man dresses funny. Like how?

ELSIE: *Jagrajagra*. You know...

NANGA: Okay. I go teach am lesson.

(They leave. Odili walks in front with Chief Nanga's bag. Nanga stops and smiles at Elsie suggestively. She smiles back coyly and sinks into a chair).
Lights out.

CHOREOGRAPHED MOVEMENT OF MASKERS USING THEME MUSIC.

Act 1: Scene 6

Friday Night. Chief Nanga's Sitting Room.

Odili is sitting with Elsie, holding her possessively, but throughout the scene, she exchanges looks with Nanga.

ODILI: That was a beautiful speech you gave today.

NANGA: When an old woman hears the dance she knows her old age deserts her.

They all laugh.

ODILI: But you gave Jalio a tough time. Writers and artists sometimes behave funny. Can't always predict them. I nurse the idea of becoming a novelist because writers and artists are led by their imaginations!

ELSIE: What happened?

Jalio enters.

NANGA: (*Inspects Jalio*). What is the name of this your attire? Is this what you call national dress in your place?

JALIO: I just dress to please myself.

NANGA: Let me tell you, if you want me to attend your functions, you must learn to dress properly. You either wear a suit or if you don't like it, you can wear our national costume. That is correct protocol. If other ministers see this, they would think I am planning a coup with some rascal. (*Softens his voice*). Maybe you're pretending to be a rascal. You know people always have two faces, or even more. (*Laughs*) But as a leader of tomorrow, you must show respect to leaders of today.

JALIO: (*Nods in embarrassment, then claps his hands to get the attention of the guests*). Ladies and gentlemen, the Minister for Culture, Chief the Honorable M. A. Nanga (*applause as Jalio takes him to the high table. Chief Nanga sits down*). Your honour, on behalf of the Writers Association of Nigeria, I welcome you to this important event which showcases the great talents in this country. Your presence at this occasion affirms your commitment to arts and culture in our land. That is why many refer to you as the people's minister. Your achievements are not only recognised here but also abroad. The United States of America will be honouring you with a Doctorate Degree in a few weeks time as a testimony to your hard work. We say congratulations

(*applause*). Once more you are welcome! (*Applause as Chief Nanga stands proudly to make his speech*).

NANGA: (*Pulls up the overflowing sleeves of his caftan to his shoulders*). I thank Mr Jalio. As you know, he is the President of this Society, which has done much to project the African personality. He is also a musician...(*Looks towards Odili for confirmation but Odili shakes his head*). Anyway, (*begins to read from his script*) I wish to make it known that the government is not leaving any stone unturned to make sure that this nation produces great writers like William Shakespeare and Michael West...ehm, Longman, Shortman, etc, etc (*Elsie Laughs*). We will continue to promote arts and culture so that everybody in this country will learn how to be cultured. Thank you very much and God bless our country. (*Applause*)

Jalio exits.

ELSIE: That was great, Chief the Honourable!

NANGA: If you think so, then I deserve an embrace. (*Opens his arms wide. Elsie hugs him with some sense of intimacy. Odili stares at them, a bit confused*).

ODILI: Elsie, I think we should go in now. (*Pointedly*) The Chief is working on his files.

ELSIE: I'm not sleepy yet.

CHIEF NANGA: Good. In that case why don't you help me with these (*points at some files*).

ELSIE: Okay. Go on Odii. I'll join you later.

ODILI: (*Appears to change his mind and sits back in the living room. Nanga and Elsie are apparently uncomfortable with his decision. After some time, he decides to go in*) Good night, Chief.

NANGA: Sweet dre-a-ms!

Nanga pretends to be reading the papers in his file. Then goes to Elsie and holds her. She does not resist as they get intimate. Odili steps to the doorway and stares at them.

ODILI: So...(*Nanga and Elsie are startled. They quickly adjust themselves*).

NANGA (*Walks towards Odili trying to touch him by his shoulder*) But you told me there is nothing between you and her and she told me the same.

ODILI: (*Shrugs Nanga's hand off*) Don't touch me! Otherwise the media will hear about two of us today (*Nanga recoils*).

NANGA: You are taking this thing too far. After all, she is not your wife. But anyway, I am sorry. I tender unreserved apology. If you want, I can arrange a dozen for you even this night. You go do the thing sotay you go beg say you no wan' do am again. (*Laughs*).

ODILI: Look at that! (*Goes and takes his bag and begins to walk away*). Minister of Culture! I am sorry for this country.

NANGA: (*Follows behind him as if to attack him*) Look here, my friend, don't insult me because of common woman! (*Elsie's shock increases*).

ODILI: (*Turns abruptly and Nanga stops, frightened*). If you had a common woman as your mother, mine wasn't common. But one more thing: Remember, I do not forget and I always have the last laugh (*walks away*).

NANGA: (*Rooted to his position*) I don't blame you! Na my fault to bring you to my house to help you. Ungrateful ingrate!

In dim light, beggars, lunatics and night-soil men, all move their heads in their various positions to the rhythm of the theme music, using face masks choreographically around a forlorn and disillusioned Odili.

ODILI (Commentary): It was a real dark night. So lonely. Every soul around me was a sad story: beggars, lunatics, night-soil men – all waiting for the sun to rise. For the first time, I saw the real Lagos and I hated myself for coming. "But are you not Odili", I said to myself: "You should think of how to have the last laugh." I thought of revenge. I thought of that girl that told me her name is Edna, who I came to understand was Nanga's intended parlour wife. Meanwhile, like every downtrodden creature sleeping on the street, I eagerly awaited the sun. Very early, I went to tarry with Max, my good friend, for a while before returning to the village. But when I found Max, I was armed with double revenge.

Act 1: Scene 7

Saturday, Evening. Max house.

Max introduces Odili to members of his new political party, CPC.

MAX: So lady and gentlemen. This is Odili Samalu, a very good friend of mine. In the University, we called him, Diligent. He likes to be thorough.

ODILI: And we called him Cool Max because he always played it cool.

EUNICE: He still does (*Rolling her eyes*).

Laughter

MAX: (*Introduces members*) Odili, this is Eunice, my fiancée. She is a lawyer. We met at the London School of Economics. This is Joe, secretary to the Trade Union and Rafi our friend, the merchant of Lebanon, and my humble self, Maxwell Kulamo. We have other members not present at the moment, most of them, professionals. Comrades, I have been talking to Odili about our new party, Common People's Convention. He is a very trustworthy comrade and he will boost our cause. We have a very corrupt government which he knows and indeed has experienced. Only last night, his girlfriend was snatched away from him by one of our ministers. Name, withheld. So/

RAFI: (*Interrupting*) Nangarian trademark, yes?

MAX: So, I have been trying to convince him on why he should come on board and help in saving the common people from these hired labourers who call themselves leaders. (*Comrades nod and make comments in support of Max*). I know it's not going to be an easy decision for him because his dad is the local chairman for People's Organisational Party, the almighty POP.

ODILI: My great worry is that I can see only professionals in Common People's Convention. Any effort to uproot this government that does not get to the grassroots is bound to fail. Watching the common people dancing themselves lame, celebrating Nanga, the day he visited his home town, I am afraid, this would be a wasted effort if they do not get involved.

EUNICE: We are at the formation stage and these professionals are the vanguard. Once everything is ready, everybody else will join.

MAX: The ordinary people are critical in our plans. Great revolutions were initiated by intellectuals, not the common people themselves. The people are like reeds beside the road: they only bend to the wind.

JOE: Professionals or not, the question is: how can we rid our polity of corruption? How can we rid our country of corrupt leadership?

RAFI: By blocking off Britain! BOB.

MAX: Rafi, get serious.

ODILI: Well, I encountered more American diplomats than British diplomats/

RAFI: Beware of invisible diplomats (*Laughter*).

ODILI: And it is to America that Chief Nanga will be travelling to receive an honorary award/

RAFI: In lechery! (*Laughter*). LLD, Doctor of Legalised Lechery.

MAX: That is what the west is busy doing: honouring African stooges! No remorse!

JOE: They stole our walking stick and gave us a fake one in the name of democracy.

RAFI: This one is only demo. There is no *cracy* in the stick.

JOE: No shape, no form. Even the language is corrupt.

MAX: And it gives pleasure to the West. They suck Africa lean, her breasts are dry. Yet they keep sucking.

EUNICE: Pessimism! Pessimism! The blame game is here again.

MAX: Every evil has got a root cause. And that root cause will always take its share of the blame.

EUNICE: And what blame have you apportioned to the intellectuals of this country? To yourself and to all of us who have left politics in the hands of illiterates and failed to educate the masses? Do we no longer believe in the power of the people, the common people, to overhaul the system? If we don't why are we here? (*There are shouts of 'hear, hear'.*) Yes! Just give the masses the right stuff/

RAFI: (*Cuts in*) Homemade coffee! (*loud and prolonged laughter*)...and burn their intestines.

ODILI: I witnessed the comedy live. (*Comrades except Max are surprised*).

MAX: Yes, he did: a great asset to our cause. My evidence against Koko is piling and surely, I am going hit him hard in our constituency during the elections. It is providential Odili is here with us. He is like the fairytale hero who explored the spirit world, wrestled with them and came back with a magical box of wealth. Knowledge is that wealth. We shall use it to enrich the public. Comrades!?

COMRADES: Our voice!

MAX: No more shall we stand and stare while criminals like Nanga, Koko, Kobino, Wagada keep deceiving our people. Never again shall we leave politics in the hands of men, who care for nothing else, except women, cars, landed property! Heartless machineries that stack our money in foreign banks and watch our people die of hunger. They destroy our educational system and send their children overseas and private

schools. Yes, because they want only their children to inherit the land that belongs to all of us. Never again shall we stand and stare! Comrades!?

COMRADES: Our voice!

MAX: Because the people are like reeds beside the road that bend to the wind, we will blow out information to take the people along with us. Information, we believe, is the key to social change. It is both the tool and weapon we need to achieve a truly independent African State, free from colonial control. Comrades!?

COMRADES: Our voice!

ODILI: Are you real?

COMRADES: Yes we are!

All rise and stand behind Odili.

ODILI: A truly independent African State? Sounds like a castle in a malaria dream; but then, if we do not dream, we wake up to nothing. I have come to Lagos and I have seen why it is imperative on us to stand up and save Africa. Africa is in the hands of constituted rogues with no atom of shame! And if we do nothing now, I said, now!, generations to come will set fire on our graves. I will fight this cause with you, I am your comrade, even if it takes the last drop of my blood. CPC!

COMRADES: New life to the people! (*Comrades cheer him and shake hands of welcome while singing a suitable song of solidarity, holding hands with one another while leading Odili out.*)

Exit all.

CHOREOGRAPHED MOVEMENT OF MASKERS USING THEME MUSIC

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Tuesday afternoon. Odili walks across a fleeting urban setting while commenting.

ODILI (Commentary): I could not help asking myself one question: Did I become a politician because of the loss of a woman? I never wanted to get involved but only wanted a good life. But Nanga opened my eyes to see how political power determines good life; how folly it is to shun politics and expect change for the better.

The background scene changes to Anata village road with villagers making caricature of Josiah, the shopkeeper.

So, I came back to the village to seek both Edna and Nanga's political seat; to have the last laugh. On the day I came back from Lagos to Anata, something strange happened.

VILLAGER: (*Stands beside Odili with the Blind Man holding his stick*) Josiah steal blind man walking stick to make charm. He want all of us to blind and buy from him. But the blind man know his own stick! (*He helps Odili with his suitcase and exits.*)

THE VILLAGERS: (*Chorus*) Josiah has taken so much for the blind man to see! (*They carry Josiah around three times, singing: 'Tufuonu nwa aruru ala e, echi anyi amuta ozọ!' – 'Throw away the corrupt child, we'll beget another child tomorrow'. The mime throwing Josiah into the audience.*)

ODILI (Commentary) The village treatment of Josiah was a very significant one for me. Nanga and the politicians had taken so much for the blind to see. I saw hope rising that Nanga's corrupt ways would eventually get punished. I was going to open the people's eyes and arouse them to action. But before declaring the public battle, I went in search of Edna, that his young fiancée.

As the villagers disperse from beating Josiah Edna enters and Odili goes to her.

ODILI: So, how is your mother, Edna?

EDNA: We thank God. She is getting better.

ODILI: Chief asked me to come and see how she is doing.

EDNA: The doctor says we should give her few weeks. They might discharge her then.

ODILI: So, she will be there on Christmas day? Why not come over to my place? I can ride you over to the hospital on my bike.

EDNA: I'll be going to help Mrs Nanga serve her visitors.

ODILI: Mrs Nanga? Why?

EDNA: She asked me to come and help her.

ODILI: So, it is true, really!

EDNA: What is true?

ODILI: You and Chief?

EDNA: What do you mean by that?

ODILI: Nothing, really. Just that I find it hard to comprehend.

EDNA: Sorry, Mr Samalu, I thought you said Chief sent you to ask about my mother? What is the problem?

ODILI: Like I just said, nothing. But are you not intelligent enough to understand that Chief and his wife are masking? Can't you see they are using marriage to take you as a house girl? Otherwise, tell me why Mrs Nanga would ask you to come and serve her visitors on Christmas day, knowing full well that your mother is in hospital and that you need to keep her company. How can you leave your sick mother to go and attend to another woman on Christmas day? If Mrs Nanga is in your mother's situation, will she be happy?

EDNA: *(Pause)* Are you interested in me?

ODILI: Has it come to that?

ELSIE: Well, I don't know. We only met once you are talking me this way... your wife or house girl. So, what is the problem?

ODILI: All am giving you is useful advice to think again about this Nanga business because you don't want to lose your freedom at such a tender age. You want to become Mrs Nanga's house girl?

EDNA: Is there any time a woman has freedom in this society? Anyway, thank you, Mr Samalu, for your concern. Unfortunately, I can't change my agreement with Mrs Nanga.

Mr Odo, Edna's father, enters.

MR ODO: *(Expresses surprise to see Edna with a male stranger).*

ODILI: Good day, sir.

MR ODO: Mm-hh?

EDNA: Papa this is Chief's friend, Mr Samalu. He is a teacher at the Grammar School. He came back from Lagos and Chief asked him to come and see how mama is doing.

MR ODO: (*More relaxed*) Ooo! Teacher, *ibiala*, welcome. How my in-law?

ODILI: He is fine, sir

MR ODO: My in-law give you message?

EDNA: Ah, papa! Did his wife not bring you message last week?

MR ODO: *Gee nu ya nti*, listen to her. Because she eat yesterday, she is not eat today. No, my daughter. Leave me and my in-law before he carry you go away. Our people say, if you are not take away strong man sword when he lie on ground, are you take it when he stand up? My in-law is big politician'. Politician' money do not come after, it is before. So, my daughter, it is now that my in-law will bring and bring and bring and your father will eat and eat and eat. I thank *Obasi* God, my in-law bag is full every time. Please, teacher, tell my in-law, we need money to find people clear our farm. The woman of the house is not well. Do you hear?

ODILI: I have heard you, sir.

MR ODO: Edna, look at the house, I am go to tap my palm trees.

Mr Odo exits.

ODILI: Do you really love Chief Nanga? Look into my eyes and tell me you love such an old man.

EDNA *looks away.*

ODILI: Then, how can you marry him?

EDNA: I have no choice. Someone has to pay for my mother's hospital bills. Chief is also paying for me to go to college. Is it making you angry? Do I owe you anything?

ODILI: Why should I be angry with you? You are throwing away your future, not mine.

EDNA: Yes, it is *my* future. (*Walks away*).

ODILI (Commentary): I wanted to call her back but it was not in my nature to do so. I wanted to protect my pride but I was hurting inside; hurting because I was losing out again to Nanga. It was another bitter lesson about what money and power could do. No! I refused defeat! I was determined to do everything to win Edna. So on Christmas day, I became Mrs Nanga's guest awaiting Edna's service.

Christmas Day. Anata village road.

Masquerades are performing.

Act 2: Scene 2

Nanga's village home.

The house is filled with Christmas decorations.

Odili opens a bottle of beer.

ODILI: Thank you, ma.

MRS NANGA: You are welcome.

ODILI: What a Christmas day!

MRS NANGA: Many masquerades on the road?

ODILI: Very fierce ones. I narrowly escaped.

MR NANGA: Anata masquerades? Ah, *ha di egwu*; very dangerous o; but they can dance. My children like them so much. That is why I bring them home during Christmas.

ODILI: So, when are you preparing to go back to Lagos? The house there is so quiet without you and the children.

MRS NANGA: *Biko, ka m zuru ike*; let me get some rest here. Don't tell me about Lagos now. Anyway, Papa Eddy said he wants me to come back by the end of next month before he goes to America but... I don't know...

ODILI: I thought you were going with him.

MRS NANGA: Me? Mrs Nanga? Bush woman? (*laughs*)

ODILI: Why not? Who said you are a bush woman?

MRS NANGA: My brother, who dash monkey banana? They never see those standing na we wey sit for ground them go see? I think you be teacher, teach me ABC so I go follow him go America.

ODILI: Don't be saying this, ma.

MRS NANGA: When Edna comes, she will go those *place*. White man's land is not for bush, old woman like me.

ODILI: Who is Edna?

MRS NANGA: Our new wife! Did Chief not tell you?

ODILI: Whatever you call her. I bet she doesn't know half as much book as you know.

MRS NANGA: Ah, she does o. She is going to college. I no go modern school.

ODILI: Everybody knows that standard six in your time was superior to Senior Cambridge today.

MRS NANGA: You talk as if I went to school in nineteen-*kridim*.

ODILI: No. I mean that education has been falling every year.

MRS NANGA: If it Papa Eddy did not marry me, I would have been educated. I passed my entrance to Secondary School but papa Eddy's father and his people did not give me chance *nke* penny so that I will marry their son. They are doing the same thing to that young girl, Edna. They pretend it is for her own good. But she will regret. Anyway, let her come quick-quick to enjoy Chief Nanga's money before it runs away (*she laughs bitterly*).

ODILI: Is she coming into the house soon?

MRS NANGA: I don't know. What is my own there? Let her come tomorrow, I don't care; the house is there for her to take over from me – stay awake at night, talk grammar and in the morning her dress will be smelling cigarette and white people.

ODILI: (*Laughs loudly*).

MRS NANGA: Why are you laughing? Did you not go big-man party with Papa Eddy? Nine pence talk, three pence food. Everybody you see (*demonstrates*) 'Hallo, hawa you. Nice to see you again. Good weather.' All na lie lie.

ODILI: (*Still laughing*) Why don't you advise her? You said she is a young girl.

MRS NANGA: She was born yesterday. Let her come and suck (*puts her right arm under her left breast*). Was I half her age when I got married to papa Eddy? Let her come and eat Nanga's wealth: everything is ready. Let no one remember that I married him when he was nothing and we worked together to make him something. This is my reward. Nonsense.

ODILI: (*Feigning compassion*). Do you want me to talk to her?

MRS NANGA: If you want, you can talk to her. But don't tell anyone I sent you o, biko.

ODILI: How do I see her?

MRS NANGA: She will be here soon to help me serve visitors. I have sent the driver to bring her. Let her start now to eat Chief Nanga's money. (*She laughs*)

ODILI: In that case, let me wait, then.

MRS NANGA: (*Hears the sound of car*) I think they are back. Please, don't let her know I asked you to talk to her o.

Edna enters.

EDNA: Good day, ma (*Surprised to see Odili*). Merry Christmas!

MRS NANGA: Aah, Edna, Merry Christmas my daughter! (*Goes and hugs her and brings her to Odili*) Mh, Edna! This is Papa Eddy's friend. He is our special Christmas visitor, so I would like you to serve him. Not these children who don't know their left from their right.

EDNA: Good afternoon, Mr Samalu, Merry Christmas!

ODILI: (*Stands*) Ah, Edna, good afternoon and Merry Christmas! (*they shake hands*).

MRS NANGA: You already know yourselves?

ODILI: The day Chief visited our school, right? (*His gesture forces Edna to agree*).

EDNA: (*Half-heartedly*) Yes.

MRS NANGA: Hm! (*leans backwards*) You young people, *unu dikwa egwu*, you are wonderful o. Anyway, since you know yourselves, I leave you both. Take care of him, oh, *nne*? (*She leaves them and goes but stops half way and gives Odili signs to talk to her very well*).

EDNA: Okay, more drinks?

ODILI: Am okay with this.

EDNA: Is that all? What of rice?

ODILI: No, I ate before coming.

EDNA: Let me bring you some meat.

ODILI: Okay.

(Edna leaves. The masquerade music wells up and Odili joins in the song. Edna returns with a drink and meat. After serving Odili, she stands front stage, looking out).

ODILI: Edna, why don't you sit down?

EDNA: I'm alright here; I want to see what's going on along the road.

ODILI: Is anything going on?

EDNA: Oh, masquerades and people in their Christmas best. How did you pass through the masquerades? They do not allow strangers to cross.

ODILI: Well, you need a mask to get through strange masquerades. I had to put on a mask.

EDNA: A mask? *(Turns sharply).*

ODILI: *(Odili brings out a mask head from his bag and shows her).* Strange situations can force a mask on you.

EDNA: What do you mean?

ODILI: Never mind. Here is your Christmas gift.

EDNA: *(Receives her gift and unwraps it. It is a face mask)* Mask? Why? *(admires the mask).* Can I try it on?

ODILI: Why not? Try it. Mask on mask; on your beautiful face, yes! *(laughs).*

EDNA: That's not funny! Let me see. *(She puts it on and makes faces at Odili).*

(Odili responds by putting on his and they swing their heads to the rhythm of the theme music. They both laugh but she leaves Odili and goes looking outside)

ODILI: Anybody can put on a mask but for different reasons.

EDNA: It makes people look ugly.

ODILI: No! Just different.

EDNA: *(Giggles sarcastically)* You are very funny, Mr. Samalu.

ODILI: *(Sits down and pauses for a while).* Edna, I have something to tell you.

EDNA: Me?

ODILI: Yes, come and sit down.

EDNA: *(Hesitates before going to sit down).*

ODILI: I know you were not happy the last time we met. That's why I decided to be here today to see if I can get the chance to talk to you again. Edna, I have seen the world more than you have and I consider myself your friend and that's why I am taking all this trouble to talk to you. *(He takes another sip).* You will be making great mistake to allow yourself to be rushed into marriage now. You are too young for that, what more, marrying a polygamist.

EDNA: *(Snapping)* Is that what Mama asked you to tell me?

ODILI: Who is Mama? Oh, Mrs Nanga. Why? Why should she ask me to tell you such a thing? No, Edna, it is in your own interest. You can't go and spoil your life like that.

EDNA: What is your business in it? That's my question, which you do not want to answer.

ODILI: None whatsoever. Except that I think a beautiful young girl like you deserves better than to marry a polygamist; far ahead of you in years.

EDNA: Well, that is the world of women.

ODILI: Rubbish! You are now in college and shouldn't be saying a thing like that.

EDNA: *(Gets up and walks back to the rail).* He is the one paying for it.

ODILI: So what!? *(Bends his head in regret. Then, gets up and goes to Edna putting his arm round her waist. Edna swings round sharply in rejection. They stand apart, looking at each other. Edna's eyes fall and she turns away, looking out again. Odili goes back to his seat. Silence).* I ask your pardon, Edna. Do not misunderstand me. You are right that all this is none of my business, really. Please, forget everything I said. *(Silence).*

EDNA: *(Goes and takes her seat)* Have I offended you? *(Rolls her eyes).*

ODILI: How can you offend me? *(They stare at each other).*

EDNA: So, what do you think I should do?

ODILI: Just give yourself a chance. That's all...that's all am saying.

EDNA: Chance with who? I thought he is your friend.

ODILI: Even if he, Chief Nanga, is my father or brother. *(Pause)* I know you can do better than most girls out there but it's like nobody has made you to realise that you have great potentials.

(Edna bends her head down, supported by her hands. Shortly, tears begin to drop from her eyes. Odili puts down his cup and tries to stop her from crying). Edna, don't please. *(Odili offers her his handkerchief. Edna collects it slowly but does not use it. She keeps sobbing. They hear Mrs Nanga's steps. Edna quickly wipes her tears but Mrs Nanga notices).*

MRS NANGA: *(Walks towards them)* Edna, is our guest alright?

EDNA: *(Avoids eye contact with Mrs Nanga)* Yes, ma.

MRS NANGA: *(Touches Edna on the shoulder with scrutiny)* Ah ah! *(Looks at Odili),* Odili what is wrong?

EDNA: I am alright.

ODILI: She touched her eyes with pepper in her hands. I suppose it is from the dry meat she served me. I don't think she knew there was pepper on it.

MRS NANGA: Oh *(Laughs hysterically),* you didn't know? Go and wash your hands, then? *(Edna leaves. Mrs Nanga watches and sucks the air and makes fun of Edna)* She does not know there is pepper on the meat. Ah! This is still morning. She hasn't seen anything yet. Come and eat meat without pepper.

ODILI: *(Odili watches Mrs Nanga a while and then starts laughing too.)* Ah, Mrs Nanga, I forgot I have Christmas Present for you. *(Brings out a wrapped gift for Mrs Nanga).* Merry Christmas!

MRS NANGA: Odili or whatever they call you, keep your gift. Do you hear? If you try this nonsense you did today with me again, I will tell you who I am.

ODILI: What is it, ma?

MRS NANGA: You are asking me what is it, eh? You told me lie, you don't know her! eekwa? Who sent you? I said, who sent you here? Is that what you were planning in Lagos with my husband, eeh? *(She pulls the wrapped gift out of Odili's hands and tries to hit him with it but Odili runs away. She feels the gift, unwraps it and beholds a face mask. She is first dismayed. Then, she bursts into her hysterical laughter again. Meanwhile down stage, maskers are in a choreographed movement. They flip their masks off and on their faces using the theme music. Up stage, Mrs Nanga eventually begins to admire the mask and ends up joining in the choreographed movement).*

Exit all.

Act 2: Scene 3

Afternoon. Odili's village house.

Odili is reading Edna's letter.

ODILI: *(Reads aloud)* 'Dear Odili, I have noted carefully all that you said about my marriage. Really, you should pity poor me, Odili. I am in a jam about the whole thing. If I develop cold feet now my father will almost kill me. Where is he going to find all the money the man has paid on my head? So it is not so much that I want to be called a minister's wife but a matter of can't help. What cannot be avoided must be borne.'

(Interjects) Rubbish!

(Keeps reading) 'What I pray for is happiness. If God says that I will be happy in any man's house I will be happy. I hope we will always be friends. For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision but today's friendship makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Good-bye and sweet dreams.'

Yours very truly, Edna Odo.

PS. My brother told me you have bought a new car. Congrats and more grease to your elbows. I hope you will carry me in it one day' *(smiles).*

ODILI: *(Scans through the letter)* Dear Odili: I wrote her My Dearest Edna and this is all she has for me, Dear Odili. Mmm...sweet dreams...sweet dreams...okay, maybe, that one. *(Pause)*

Boniface and colleague (Odili's thugs) enter.

Odili questions them with his look.

BONIFACE: Oga, we need Twenty-five Thousand Naira.

ODILI: But I gave you Ten Thousand Naira yesterday.

BONIFACE: Are you there? If na play we dey play make you tell us because me I no wan waste my time for nothing sake. Or you think na so so talk talk you go take win Chief Nanga? If gov'ment no give you plenty money for election make you tell them no be sand sand we de take do am...

2ND THUG: Man no fit fight tiger with empty hand.

ODILI: Boniface, no be government dey give us money. We be small party, CPC. We want help poor people like you. How government go give us money? This government no like anything wey go help poor people.

BONIFACE: But na who dey give the er...wetin call...PCP money?

ODILI: Some friends abroad.

2ND THUG: You no fit send your friends telegram?

ODILI: Let's not go into that now. What do you need Twenty-five Thousand Naira for? And what have you done with the Ten Thousand Naira?

BONIFACE: We give Three Thousand-Five to that policeman so that he go spoil the paper for our case. Then we give One Thousand-Five to Court Clerk because they say as the matter don reach him eye the policeman no kuku spoil am just like that. Then we give another Two Thousand to/

ODILI: *(interrupting)* All right. What do you want the Twenty-five Thousand Naira for?

BONIFACE: So they no tell you say Chief Nanga don return back from Lagos yesterday?

ODILI: So? You wan give him money or wetin?

BONIFACE: This no be matter for joke; we wan the money to pay certain persons wey go go him house for night and burn him car.

ODILI: What!? No, we don't need to do that.

BONIFACE: Look, my frien, I don tell you say if you no wan serious for this business make you go rest for house. I don see say you wan play too much gentleman for this matter... *(leaves)*

2ND THUG: Dem tell you say na gentlemanity de give other people minister...? Anyway wetin be my concern there? Na you sabi. *(leaves)*.

(Odili goes back to Edna's letter.)

MR SAMALU: *(entering from indoors)* Odili. Who were those men?

ODILI: Political allies, Papa.

MR SAMALU: Ha! They sounded tough.

ODILI: Politics is tough. Are you not the local chairman for your party?

MR SAMALU: Politics is what you get out of it. Not this type of boys you call your allies. But if you want that type of kill and eat politics, then you go to your quarters in Anata; not here in my house.

ODILI: I know you are seeking a way to chase me away. I am only here for the weekend. Tomorrow I go back. But don't send anybody to me when there is something to do with money.

Nanga enters.

SAMALU: *(With excitement)* Welcome, Chief the Honourable! Welcome.

NANGA: Thank you, Sir. How has it been?

SAMALU: Oh! Very well. Sit down, please.

NANGA: Hello! Odili, my great enemy.

ODILI: *(Keeps his eyes on the letter and responds very casually)* Hello.

MR SAMALU: *(Surprised)* Odili, is that how you greet the Honourable Minister?

NANGA: Let him be, sir.

MR SAMALU: (*Moves towards Odili with rage*) Odili! Odili! Will you greet Chief the Honourable Minister properly! (*Odili ignores him but rather pockets Edna's letter, stares at his father and picks a newspaper, spreading it across his face*). Chief the Honourable Minister, you are most welcome to my house. Please, forget this stupid boy. With more than twelve children in my house, their troubles put together do not measure up to one quarter of the trouble this boy gives me...right from birth, Chief, right from/

NANGA: Please sir, don't worry about Odili.

MR SAMALU: But if he wants to put his head into a pot, then he should wait until he builds his own house not here in my own house. If he has no respect for me, he must not carry his foolishness to such an important guest.

NANGA: No, sir. You are my political father; this is my house; so I am no guest here. Without the backing of people like you at home, we cannot achieve anything in Lagos. Don't mind all these young boys saying all kinds of rubbish against me... what do they know? They break their heads because they hear that Chief Nanga has eaten ten percent commission. Do they know that all commissions are paid into party funds? What do they know? (*Odili lowers his newspaper at half-mast and looks at Chief Nanga*).

MR SAMALU: That's right.

ODILI: I suppose your new four-storey building is going to be the party headquarters (*puts down the newspaper*).

MR SAMALU: Shut your dirty mouth! Chief the Honourable Minister was not talking to you.

ODILI: I don't expect him to, because he knows I know what he knows.

MR SAMALU: I said, shut up! Shut up your dirty mouth!

NANGA: Leave him alone, sir. Let him finish advertising his ignorance and then I will educate him. (*Pause*). Have you finished, Mr Nationalist? Listen: he that knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool.

MR SAMALU: Please Chief, don't mind this boy. If I had another like him, I would have died long ago.

MR SAMALU: (*blesses the kola nut*) Honourable. Here is kola. It brings life in abundance. When a mad man walks naked, it is his kinsmen who feel the shame. So, I beg forgiveness from the Honourable whom my son has wronged. (*To Odili*) You do not eat a man's food and call him a fool or spit in his face: that is abomination.

NANGA: Correct!

SAMALU: (*Continues the blessing*)

Na ita oji a	In eating this kola,
Oganihu k'anyi choro	We seek progress
Udo k'anyi choro	We seek peace
Aku na Uba k'anyi choro	We seek prosperity.
Ndu mmiri, ndu azu	Life of water, life of fish:
Mmiri atala,	Let the water not dry
Azu anwula	Let the fish not die.

NANGA: Isee!

(*Samalu offers the kola. He takes a bit and puts the complete one in his pocket*)

NANGA: (*Turns squarely to Odili and holds out an envelope*) Odili, this is your scholarship. Go and learn more books. The country needs experts like you. Leave the dirty game for us who know how to play it.

ODILI: Listen, Chief Nanga/

NANGA: (*Interrupts*) I don't want you to misunderstand me. Odili, I am not afraid of you. Every goat and every fowl in this country knows that you will fail woefully. You will lose your deposit and disgrace yourself. (*Brings out money*) Take. I am only giving you this money because I feel that after all my years of service to my people I deserve to be elected unopposed so that my detractors in Lagos will know that I have my people solidly behind me. That is the only reason why I am giving you this money. Otherwise, I should leave you alone to learn your bitter lesson so that when you hear of election again you will run.

ODILI: I know you are a teacher of bitter lessons.

MR SAMALU: Shut up your dirty mouth!

NANGA: I know those irresponsible boys have given you money. If you have any sense, keep the money and train your father's children with it or do something useful.... We know where that money is coming from. Don't think we don't know. We will deal with them after the election. They think they can come here and give money to irresponsible people to overthrow a duly constituted government. We will show them. As for you my brother, you can eat what has entered your hand.... Your good friend, Maxwell Kulamo, has more sense than you. He has already taken his money and agreed to step down for Chief Koko.

ODILI: (*Startled*) Impossible!

NANGA: (*Laughs scornfully*) Look at him! He does not even know what is happening; our gr-e-a-t politician! You stay here in the bush wasting your time and your friends are busy smiling to their banks in Lagos. Take that money and take your scholarship...go and learn more book! The country needs experts like you; and...leave the dirty game of politics to us who know how to play it....Mm?

ODILI: You think everyone can be bought with money? You are making a sad mistake. I will fight you along the road and inside the bush, even if you buy the entire CPC. I can see you are trying to cover your fear. I see fear in your eyes. If you know you are not afraid why do you send thugs to molest me; why do your hired cowards carry placards with my name? I am sorry, Mr Man, you can take your filthy money and clear out of here. Bush man!

MR SAMALU: (*Screams*) Odili! (*Odili ignores him. Mr Samalu turns to Chief Nanga*). Chief, I don't know how you are going to forgive this. I have worked hard for the party and for you in this constituency. Please...

NANGA: (*Stretches his hands on Mr Samalu's shoulders*) It is alright, sir. I perfectly understand how you feel. I am too old to allow a small boy's rashness and foolishness to destroy our relationship. I...I should be going. (*On his way out he turns back and talks to Odili*). And let me warn you, Odili. Stay away from Edna. I have paid dowries on her head. Go and find your own woman. Be warned!

ODILI: (*Bursts into laughter*) Remember, this pupil does not forget any lesson you teach him; he loves the last laughter. (*Continues laughing*)

(*Mr Samalu takes a deep breath as Chief Nanga takes his leave*).

MR SAMALU: So you really want to fight Chief Nanga!? My son, why don't you fall where your pieces could be gathered? Now, you have lost the sky, you have lost the ground. You have failed to take away the strong man's sword when he is on the ground.

ODILI: Why do you worry yourself and get lean over a loss that is mine and not yours at all? You are in P.O.P and I am in CPC.

MR SAMALU: And who is Edna?

ODILI: You should have asked him.

MR SAMALU: The smell of death will never allow a dog the smell of anything else. I should have known better. I thought some sense had entered your belly when you brought home a car from your party. But I should have known it was only a sensible talk of a mad man.

ODILI: And your party gives ministers authority to take bribes, eh?

MR SAMALU: (*Startled*) What?

ODILI: Did you not hear Chief Nanga say that the ten percent he receives on contracts is for your party. Is that true?

MR SAMALU: If alligator comes out of water one morning and tells you that crocodile is sick, can you doubt his story?

ODILI: I see (*Smiles with an air of victory as he watches his father go indoors*).

Enter Boniface and 2ND Thug.

BONIFACE: Wetin that thief man carry come here?

ODILI: He just came to talk with my father. You know they are in the same party.

BONIFACE: Eee? Na so? I think your eyes too dey blink. As you no want tell us, we go kuku find out ourself because, as him dey leave this house so, na so we dey follow am for Anata, go join him boys.

ODILI: Boniface! (*They ignore him*).

Exit Boniface and 2ND Thug.

There is singing outside.

Act 2: Scene 4

Enter CPC Members singing and followed by villagers.

COMRADES (*Singing 'For we are jolly good fellows' or any other suitable song with choreographed movement or dance*).

MAX: CPC!

COMRADES: New life to the people!

EUNICE: CPC!

COMRADES: Save the poor!

MAX: Diligent, Diligent!

ODILI: You didn't tell me you were coming today.

MAX: You didn't get our letter?

EUNICE: HIP, HIP, HIP –

ALL: Hurrah! (*Everyone sings*)

MAX: (*Excited*) We are here to launch CPC in your constituency.

ODILI: Oh no, Max. We can't embarrass my Old Man. I told you he is the local chairman of P.O.P.

MR SAMALU: (*At the entrance*) What has my being POP chairman got to do with it? I believe that the hawk should perch and the eagle should perch, whichever says to the other 'don't perch' may its own wing break (*exit*).

CPC MEMBERS: (*Applaud Mr Samalu with 'Hip Hip Hip, Hurray!' more*)

MAX: My fellow common citizens of our country! Fellow victims of selfish rule and wicked government! What you are witnessing today is an advanced step towards the realisation of your prayers and dreams for our country: to be a land where everyone is comfortable; where peace is built on justice. (*Applause*)

Once upon a time, a hunter killed a big-game at night. He searched for it in vain and at last, he decided to go home and await daylight. At the first light of morning he returned to the forest full of expectation. And what do you think he found?

CROWD: Tell us! Tell us!

MAX: He saw two vultures fighting over what still remained of the carcass. In great anger he loaded his gun and shot the two dirty uneatable birds. You may say that he was foolish to waste his bullet on them but I say no. He wanted to wipe out dirty thieves fighting over another man's inheritance. That hunter is you. Yes, you, the common people. And the two vultures are POP and PAP. You must stop them! (*Applause*).

EX-POLICEMAN: There were three vultures. The third and youngest was called CPC.

(*People laugh and some close to him shake his hands*).

OLD WOMAN: Why don't you leave the young man alone to tell us his story?

MAX: CPC is your togetherness to shoot the vultures devouring your inheritance. If you do not have a united front like this party, you cannot reclaim what is yours. You must be united!

The Common People's Convention, CPC, is the political truth which shall set you all free – free from the mindless gang that has hijacked our beloved country. You must not give your vote to men who have just one thing in mind – to eat and forget the people.

EX-POLICEMAN: (*raises his hand and is allowed to speak*) We know they are eating, but we are eating too. They are bringing us water and they promise to bring us electricity. That is why I say we are eating too.

YOUNG MAN: Don't mind the retired police officer. He has been eating old guinea-fowl with them. (*Everyone laughs*).

MAX: Let me tell you, that water you said they are bringing, call it abandoned project. The contractor is a free man because he has given them their ten percent. It is a typical example of what belongs to you that the vultures have devoured among themselves. I ask you: why should we be recycling old people who know nothing other than embezzlement and corruption? We have honest, young, dynamic and intelligent young men who are ready to make us savour the sweetness of this land of promise. We have

come so far and yet we are still very far. After so many years under white man's colonial regime, it is unthinkable that our own people have continued to make us strangers in our own land. They have made our lives worse. Some people even want the white man to come back.

CROWD: (*Some echo yes, some echo no*) Yes! No! No!

MAX: All you have to do is to vote for those who will deliver. Vote for CPC, your own party, vote Odili for Parliament and bring back smiles on your faces.

(*Max lifts Odili's hand. The people clap and cheer*). Last time, your town Urua voted for a son of Anata, Chief Nanga. This time Anata should vote for your own son. This is what a dog said to the other: 'you fall for me, I fall for you. (*People cheer*). A goat does not eat into a hen's stomach no matter how friendly because as our people say, ours is ours, mine is mine! I greet you all!

CROWD: (*Cheer and begin to sing and dance with choreograph*).

Mmanu akara di uto – Onye raratu ibe ya araratu ! (The cake beans oil is sweet – he the tastes it should allow his fellow to do the same).

Max takes Odili aside while the singing is going on.

MAX: Ol'boy, what is wrong? Why this cold shoulder?

ODILI: Why have you adopted the eating language? I find this unacceptable.

MAX: You must learn to come down to the people's level if you must take them with you.

ODILI: Not with this eating and national cake ideology, Max.

MAX: The cake is still national, anyway...and should reach everyone.

ODILI: Is that why you brought me out for disgrace, Max?

MAX: I don't understand.

ODILI: You don't understand? After all that enthusiasm and ideological stand, you stooped so low to take bribe money and agreed to step down for Koko? Why Max! Why! Why this deception?

MAX: How can you believe anyone who tells you that Max is going to step down for Koko?

ODILI: But you took money from him for that purpose!

MAX: Listen, Odili. The paper I signed has no legal force whatever and we needed the money.

ODILI: It has a moral force. Even Nanga's offer which had no paper for me to sign, still had a moral force. I thought we wanted our fight to be clean. My boys just left me for Nanga because I reject violence.

EX-POLICE OFFICER: (*On top of his voice*) We want to hear Odili's voice!

CROWD: Yes!

EX-POLICE OFFICER: Odili, are you ready for the challenge?

MAX: Just talk to the people, I have more information to give you. (*Odili tries to hesitate but Max urges him with a nudge*).

ODILI: *(Turns to the Crowd)* Yes! I am ready for the challenge. To free you from the gang that has continued to hold you captive since the white man left. I am sure many of you think they know who Chief Nanga is but I am telling you today, you do not know him. Just listen to this story.

On the day I returned from Lagos to Anata, the people closed Josiah's shop and they ostracised him because he stole the walking stick of a blind man to make charm so that more people will be buying from his shop. That Josiah was the first that offered to work for me when I declared my intention to contest for election. But because we are responsible people, in a responsible and people oriented party, I did not accept him. I did not accept him because I respect the will of the people and will always do. But do you know today that Josiah is Chief Nanga's henchman? This is the type of gang that Max told you we want to free you from. The choice is yours. On my part, my answer to your question is, yes, I am ready.

MAX: CPC!

CROWD: New life to the people!

EUNICE: CPC!

CROWD: Save the poor!

(The Crowd and CPC Members exiting while singing their song. Odili and Max continue their dialogue).

ODILI: You had better look out; they will be even more vicious from now on.

MAX: Oh, forget that. Do you know, Odili, that British Amalgamated has paid out one million naira to POP to fight this election? Yes, and we also know that the Americans have been even more generous, although we don't have the figures yet. Now you tell me how you plan to fight such a dirty war without soiling your hands a little. Just tell me. Anyway, we must be moving to Abaga now. I'll be here again in a couple of days to iron out everything and let you know our detailed plans from now on. Meanwhile, ol' boy, if Nanga's offer comes again, take it. It's as much your money as his.

ODILI: What sort of rubbish is that? It is our people's custom that you must render the service for which you collected money. Is it different in your own custom? Or is this urban morality or what?

MAX: When you came to Lagos answering Nanga's boy to get scholarship, is that village morality? Anyway, what is more important now is that the people are saved. See you... *(leaving)*.

ODILI: What a blunder! *(Clashes his palms against each other and is visibly angry)*.

MAX: *(Retorts as he exits)* That's what we all commit!

Exit Max

Act 2: Scene 5

Odili's encounters at Anata after CPC rally.

ODILI (Commentary): Nobody to trust anymore! I felt I was on my own. I went back to the teachers' quarters in Anata to give my father his space. Even though he allowed

our campaign in his compound, it did not change much in our frosty relationship. But Anata was aware of the CPC campaign and a new and controversial slogan had reached their ears: ‘Anata has eaten, it is now the turn of Urua.’ My school principal was first to react.

Principal Enters. Pays Odili off and exits.

He paid me one-month salary ahead and terminated my teaching appointment.

Two young men enter.

VILLAGER: Teacher, good even’.

ODILI: Yes, good evening.

VILLAGER: Na me carry your bag the day you come back Lagos. That day wey Josiah steal blind man stick...

ODILI: I know you. Why do you have to explain?

VILLAGER: We wan make you tell us how we go support you fight Chief Nanga for this election.

Josiah enters. Walks towards them.

ODILI: Is that not Josiah coming behind you?

VILLAGER: No min’ am. Na thief man. *(Before Odili opens his mouth, the villager knocks off his hat).* Sorry o, na fly I wan’ kill. *(As Odili bends to pick it up, the villager nudges him forward and he falls and they run away laughing except Josiah. Odili picks himself up and dusts himself. Josiah is standing before him).*

JOSIAH: This one na small taste. Big one dey come. I tell you say make I work for you, you refuse. Instead, you carry my name dey do campaign. You go see. *(Walks away with air of victory).*

ODILI (Commentary): It was now clear to me I was in an enemy territory. I was not safe. So I decided it was better I go back to Urua and battle it out with my father. But I wanted to tell Edna and for the sake of curiosity tell Mrs Nanga that I was leaving Anata.

Edna enters.

ODILI: *(walks towards her)* Edna!

EDNA: *(Pursues him with the face mask).* Mask wearer! Everybody has seen your face!

(As Odili runs towards the other end of the stage, Mrs Nanga appears from that end and pursues him with her own face mask. He manages to escape.

Mrs Nanga and Edna join the maskers’ choreographed movement to exit.

Act 2: Scene 6

Afternoon. Mr Samalu’s sitting room.

Odili is alone writing a letter to Edna. He reads out as he writes. The Radio is at the background.

ODILI: Dear Edna, I wonder who put it into your beautiful empty head that I want to take you from your precious man. What on earth do you think I would want to do with

a girl who has no more education than lower Elementary? By all means marry your ancient man and if you find that he is not up to it, you can always steal away to his son's bed. Yours truly...*(he stops to listen as the radio announces the sacking of his father as local Chairman of POP. He rushes to call his father).*

ODILI: Papa, the news is that you have been removed as local chairman of P.O.P It's been announced over the radio.

Mr Samalu enters.

MR SAMALU: Is that all they said?

ODILI: For anti-party activities. It's our campaign that cost you your position.

MR SAMALU: Their own palaver, not mine.

Town crier's gong is heard and they listen.

TOWN CRIER: Elders of Urua have sent me to tell you that Urua knows only one man: Chief Nanga oo! *(Sounds the gong).*

ODILI: Why are they doing this? Why?

MR SMALU: What do you expect the people to do? They have removed the water pipes and will not return them until they promise to vote Chief Nanga.

Bailiff enters.

BAILIFF: Hello, Mr Samalu. I am Mr Thunder, Senior Bailiff at High Court One. I have a court order for you.

ODILI: *(Takes the paper from the bailiff and reads the paper).* "For organising a rally in your house without police permit, you are fined the sum of one hundred thousand naira or you go to jail for 30 days."

BAILIFF: You must pay before 24 hours or you will be arrested and jailed!

ODILI: Okay. You have delivered your message. Leave this place. *(Goes indoors).*

BAILIFF: See the *nyash* you go take fight Chief Nanga. Nonsense!

MR. SAMALU: Why not go your way?

BAILIFF *(Leaving):* This na only the beginning.

Bailiff exits.

Councillor's Messenger enters.

MESSENGER: Good day, sir. I'm from the Councillor.

MR SAMALU: Good day. How is councillor?

MESSENGER: He's fine, sir. He said I should give you this *(the messenger gives him a paper which he reads aloud).*

MR. SAMALU: *(Reads)* "Dear Mr Hezekiah Samalu, I know that these few days must have been very difficult for you and your family due to obvious reasons. I want to assure you of my support and see that your recent tax levy is refunded to you. All you have to do, dear sir, is to sign the enclosed document, dissociating yourself from your son's lunatic activities and underscore that the so-called launching of CPC in your premises happened without your knowledge and consent. I am very sure, this will restore the confidence and the respect our great and God-fearing leader, Chief the

Honourable M. A. Nanga, has for you.” *(In anger; to the messenger)* If you love your life, carry your corpse away from here! *(The messenger leaves quickly as Odili enters).*

ODILI: What does he want? *(Samalu gives the letter to him. Odili reads and drops it on the table).* You made a serious mistake.

MR SAMALU: All my life, have I ever done anything good in your eyes?

ODILI: Why did you not sign this paper?

MR SAMALU: *(Silent for a while)* You may be right. But our people say that a man of worth never gets up to unsay what he said yesterday.

ODILI: Men of worth nowadays simply forget what they said yesterday.

MR SAMALU: Those who do so are not men of worth no matter their economic and social status. I received your friends in my house and I am not going to deny it. *(Pause).* But one thing I must make clear is: you brought this trouble into my compound so you should carry it. From today, whatever new tax they decide upon, I will pass the paper to you.

ODILI: *(Smiling)* That is a small matter. *(Silence).* Perhaps, you are not the man I thought you were. *(On his way out).*

MR SAMALU: Where are you going?

ODILI: I’m off to the post office.

MR SAMALU: Odili, listen to me. I don’t know what is in your head but whatever you do, don’t ever let your feet touch Anata today! Don’t ever go to Nanga’s rally. I have told you.

Mr Samalu Exits.

ODILI (Commentary): No way! It was time I fought fire with fire. Edna will read my letter and my words will hunt her. Nanga will see my face and cringe on the podium.

Odili exits.

MAQUERADES IN A CONFRONTATIONAL DANCE

Before the appearance of the two opposing forces (masquerades), a song is used to invoke the four gods of the land – Eke, Orié, Afọ, Nkwọ - as witnesses.

Eke leele – Hei, haya, haya, haya, hei!

(Eke appears in the arena)

Orie leele – Hei, haya, haya, haya, hei!

(Orie appears in the arena)

Afọ leele – Hei, haya, haya, haya, hei!

(Afọ appears in the arena)

Nkwọ leele – Hei, haya, haya, haya, hei!

(Nkwọ appears in the arena)

When all four of the gods have appeared in the form of masquerades, then the two opposing masquerades are introduced for the confrontational danced with the theme music. Then the confrontational dance begins.

At the end of the confrontational dance, the music changes for Dancers at Nanga's Political Campaign.

Act 2 Scene 7

Afternoon. Anata Arena: Nanga's Political Campaign.

Dancers are entertaining. Enter Chief Nanga and entourage as the announcer sings his praises. They take their seat. Mrs Nanga sits on his right while Edna is on his left. Dogo is directly behind Edna while Josiah is within the crowd.

ANNOUNCER: *(Two Announcers may be used):*

Chief honourable M A Nanga!

Minister of culture of this great nation!

A man that needs no introduction.

The son of Anata, son of the soil;

Our strength in foreign land.

One man we greet in plural;

Mighty tree! The Iroko! Great Masquerade!

The great sea that never dries!

(Meanwhile Josiah goes to the podium and whispers into Nanga's ear and walks away. Nanga springs up immediately and searches the crowd with his eyes).

CHIEF NANGA: *(Takes the microphone from the announcer)* Josiah! *(Josiah gets back and begins to point towards Odili's direction. Odili notices and begins to withdraw but Nanga alerts the crowd).* Stop that man wearing hat and dark glasses! *(Odili tries to escape)* I said, stop that thief trying to run away! *(Odili stops and turns towards Chief Nanga. Josiah and other thugs drag him to the podium).* Odili the great! Ha haaaaa! Odili the great!

My people, this is the boy who wants to take my seat *(the crowd roars)*. This is the boy who is thrusting his finger into my eye. He came to my house in Lagos, ate my food, and drank my water and wine. Instead of saying 'thank you', he set about plotting to drive me out and take over my house. *(Crowd roars)*. I hear some asking 'who is he?' I will tell you. He was once my pupil. I taught him ABC and I called him to come to my house to arrange for him to go England and get more education. I take the blame. He didn't just come to my house – I called him. He even tried to take a girl on whose head I had put a full bride-price and many other expenses *(tries to pull Edna's hands away from covering her face)*. But my wife caught him and told me. Odili the great! So you have come to seek me out, eh? You are very brave; or have you come to seek Edna, eh? Take the microphone and tell my people why you have come; tell them, they are listening.

ODILI: *(Takes the microphone)* I have come to tell your people that you are a liar and...*(Chief Nanga takes the mic away; slaps Odili on the face. Odili replies with a slap before Chief Nanga's thugs seize his hands behind his back giving Chief Nanga advantage over him. Edna comes between them but Chief Nanga pushes her violently to the floor. Police and Nanga's thugs join in beating Odili. Nanga tries to stop Edna from walking away but she pulls herself away from his grip. Odili is beaten unconscious. Police officers carry him away).*

Some people begin to chant Nanga's praises and dance around while others disperse in chaotic manner. Lights go out gradually. Flute blows softly and Edna is the last to

leave as she gets off the ground transformed. Then, the light returns gradually to reveal Odili in hospital in his narrative position.

BACK TO PRESENT

ACT THREE

Scene 1

Afternoon. Hospital.

Mr Samalu and Edna continue in their frozen positions.

ODILI: Now you know my journey to this place. Tell my story to my father. He warned me not to approach Nanga's rally. Tell it to Edna: she was the only one who tried to save me. Tell her to free herself from the evil man.

(Odili falls back into coma).

EDNA: Let me go and dress my wound.

MR SAMALU: Alright, my daughter.

Edna exits.

Max enters.

He is dressed like a doctor. Police Officers follow him behind questioning his identity.

MAX: *(Furious. Turns to the Police officers)* I have told you that I am Doctor Paul, an orthopaedic specialist. I have come to carry out a comprehensive orthopaedic examination of the patient, to assess the state of the internal injuries sustained from the political pandemonium which you were unable to control. So, in keeping with our medical ethics, only a close relative can be allowed to observe the examination. Can I plead with you, gentlemen of the law, to excuse us for a few minutes to enable us carry out this essential medical exercise. Please.

(The police officers look at themselves and oblige).

SERGEANT: Make you do quick commot o. This no be place to blow big grammar. Wey your ID sef?

MAX: Which ID? You see me in my gown and my stethoscope and you are asking me for ID. Okay, where is your own ID? *(The policemen look at themselves and leave reluctantly).*

Exit Policemen.

MAX: Hello, Sir. I am Max, you remember me?

MR SAMALU: Yes, my son. What happened? They said Odili is an illegal political candidate.

MAX: That's why am here. I have a new nomination form he has to sign. I didn't know he's that bad. I have to submit the form myself before closing time tomorrow. The one he posted never reached the Electoral office. The Posts in this area are working for Chief Nanga, I suppose.

MR SAMALU: As you can see, he is still in coma.

MAX: *(Making sure they are out, wakes Odili and gives him the form to sign).* Odili, this is Max. Please sign a new nomination form *(Odili does not respond).* Ol'boy, na me o. Wake up.

Odili wakes to their excitement. But they are cautious.

ODILI: *(With dimmed eyes).* Which day is the election?

MR SAMALU: *(Shocked)* Ssh!

Police officers enter.

SERGEANT: *(Notices)* Corpra! Handcuff! *(They go towards Odili's bed).*

MR SAMALU: *(Blocks their way)* What is it?

SERGEANT: He is awake. And this man must show us his identity.

MAX: Officers, now listen to me. You are supposed to be men of the law and therefore should respect laws surrounding other people's profession. I have respected you in your profession. If you don't reciprocate and allow me to do my job, I will take the matter personal. Not only will I contact the IG, my friend and schoolmate, to make sure you regret your behaviour this afternoon, I will also charge you for violation of human right. If you performed your duty at the rally, no one would have been harmed and there would have been no reason for me to be here.

The Police officers step aside.

SERGEANT: But where the other Doctor wey dey work here? Corpra! Go find the other Doctor.

MAX: I need to test your hands *(Puts the pen in Odili's hands. Pretends helping Odili to write while the later signs his signature while the police officers are distracted).*

ODILI: *Signs his signature on the form.*

MAX: *(Uses the stethoscope on Odili and scribbles something on paper).* Thank you, sir. Your son will be okay soon.

MR SAMALU: Thank you, Doctor.

Max Leaves.

Corporal enters.

CORPORAL: The doctor no dey around.

SERGEANT: *(To Mr Samalu).* Who be that man?

MR SAMALU: But he told you.

The officers want to harass Mr Samalu.

Doctor enters.

DOCTOR: What is the problem?

SERGEANT: You send any doctor make him come test this man?

DOCTOR: No, why?

SERGEANT: Corpra!

CORPRA: Yes, Serg!

SERGEANT: Stay here, I go catch the man myself. *(He makes to run after Max but is halted by Messenger from Chief Nanga).*

Messenger enters:

MESSENGER: *(To the police officers).* Chief Nanga say make una come for briefing for Saturday election, now, now. Him say make me and una come now, now because him wan go Lagos and come back.

Messenger exits.

Police Officers exit.

DOCTOR: *(Goes and looks out)* They are gone. At least, for now.

Lights fade out and fade in.

ODILI: *(Lifts his head)* So, which day is the election?

Odili freezes in this position with his eyes closed and dreams of proceedings at the election played out in the next scene.

Act 3: Scene 2

Afternoon, Election day. Polling Station.

Choreographed, stylized movement with theme music towards the ballot box.

There are two ballot boxes on the stage. 'Vote for Chief Honourable Nanga' is written with Nanga's picture on one box while 'Vote for Mr Odili' is on the other. People file up to cast their votes but the line is only towards Chief Nanga's box. Two police officers are watching and making sure everyone is voting for Chief Nanga. A young man pulls away from the line towards Odili's box. A police officer tries to halt him but he refuses and casts his vote into Odili's box. As he leaves, he pulls up his shirt as he walks across the police officer as a way of bragging. The police officer pulls him back. Quarrel ensues. As the young man exchanges words with the police officer, the second police officer comes, slaps the boy in the face, and pushes him away. The boy staggers; the crowd of voters are enjoying the quarrel. Unexpectedly, as the second police officer moves towards the young man, he retaliates with a slap and runs away. The two officers give him a chase. A few more people break away from the line and cast their vote into Odili's box. Chief Nanga who is coming to cast his vote meets the police officers at the exit. Chief Nanga halts them and sends them back to their posts. Chief Nanga is in the company of his wife, Mrs Nanga and two thugs. The police officers stop the voting line to make way for the Chief to cast his vote. (crowd noise).

CROWD: "Chief, Chief...."

(He casts his vote with his wife and pulls out an envelope (containing money) and hands it to the electoral officer. The crowd is still buzzing "Chief, Chief". As he leaves, he brings out two bundles of money and sprays them in the air. There is stampede as the crowd struggles to pick the money. In the midst of this confusion, Nanga's thugs exchange the ballot box with the one they have brought. A fan of Odili tries to intervene but the police carry him away. The voting comes to an abrupt end. The electoral officer and the police take the voting boxes away. After picking the money, the crowd begins to run around the stage singing Nanga's praises).

CROWD: *(Singing)*

Nanga, Nanga, Nanga k'anyi g'eso; / ma o n'eje-eje, ma o n'alo-alo, /Nanga k'anyi g'eso.

(Translation: 'Nanga, we shall follow; whether he goes, whether he comes, Nanga we shall follow').

Lights fade out and fade in.

ODILI: *(Startled. Lifts his head)* Nanga has won! He has rigged the election!

MR SAMALU: You are not well Odili. Where did you see Nanga win the election?

ODILI: I saw it. I was there. I tried to stop them from rigging the election but the police and the army carried me away. The people deserted me praising Nanga.

MR SMALU: Relax, my son. It is only a dream.

Odili relaxes and fall back to sleep and dreams of young villagers celebrating Nanga's victory.

Act 3: Scene 3

Evening. Urua village playground. Four Villagers in a game:

Using template from the Igbo game of 'uga', four villagers run around in a circle three times singing 'We have recycled' with the chorus 'Ebebe ebebe' which means 'forever and ever'.

THE VILLAGERS:

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

1ST VILLAGER: We are a nation of recyclers.

2ND VILLAGER: Because no one who drank the old wine wants the new wine.

3RD VILLAGER: Because old wine is good.

4TH VILLAGER: It is well fermented.

1ST VILLAGER: With bees, flies and dregs!

ALL: *(all laugh)* Ha, ha, ha!

2ND VILLAGER: You better drink it or the bees will sting you. *(Laughter).*

3RD VILLAGER: We'll keep drinking it until our throats begin to revolt.

(Together, they drink from their cups. The first Villager scratches his throat, looks at the second; the second scratches his throat, and then they scratch together. They sit on the ground, grab masks and put on).

4TH VILLAGER: I heard that, the young man woke up on the Election Day and asked his father, "which day is the election"? *(laughter)*

1ST VILLAGER: The toddler that wears the father's cloak will have the cloak blindfold him. *(laughter).*

2ND VILLAGER: *(Clears his voice and the other turns towards him with surprise looks)* I heard/

3RD VILLAGER: No, they said

4TH VILLAGER: the young woman *(Looks at the other to agree)*

3RD VILLAGER: *(Nod in agreement)* Yes, the young woman.

2ND VILLAGER: ...stayed with the young man in the hospital, all night.

1ST, 3RD, 4TH VILLAGERS: Uh-uh!

4TH VILLAGER: They said...

2ND VILLAGER: Oh no, you heard.

1ST VILLAGER: They said, I heard.

3RD VILLAGER: Yes, drive forward.

1ST VILLAGER: ...the police were guarding the young man like a president/

2ND VILLAGER: No, like a prisoner until Nanga won the election.

3RD VILLAGER: Call him Chief.

4TH VILLAGER: And Honourable...

1ST VILLAGER: ...yes, reappointed Minister!

ALL: (*shout and stand*) O yes, we have recycled! Ebebe ebebe!

We have recycled – Ebebe ebebe!

We have recycled – Ebebe ebebe!

We must recycled – Ebebe ebebe!

2ND VILLAGER: We are a nation of recyclers.

3RD VILLAGER: We bring back waste papers from stinking bins.

4TH VILLAGER: I heard/

1ST VILLAGER: Yes, you heard, because they said.

3RD VILLAGER: ...that the young man and his group are worried that Nanga/

2ND VILLAGER: Chief/

1ST VILLAGER: Honourable/

2ND VILLAGER: Reappointed Minister/

3RD VILLAGER:and his group have eaten so much/

4TH VILLAGER: Let them eat. Did we commit suicide when the white man was eating alone?

1ST VILLAGER: No! He came, he ate, he went. But we the people (*they join hands*),

ALL: ...we the people...we are still here o o! (*They laugh and sing 'We have recycled' dancing around once and masking their faces as they make their exit*).

ODILI (Startled). I told you Papa!

MR SAMALU: What did you tell me?

ODILI: I told you that Nanga has won. I saw our youths celebrating his victory and making fun of me.

MR SAMALU: You believe your dreams?

ODILI: Yes I do.

MR SAMALU: Well, what is more believable is that you are a free man and the doctor has also said we can go home.

ODILI: A free man?

MR SMALU: We shall talk about that later.

Act 3: Scene 4

Afternoon. Mr Samalu's sitting room.

Odili is wearing a T-shirt. He has bandage round his head and plasters on his face and hands.

Joe enters.

JOE: *(In a state of shock)* Odili!

ODILI: Joe.

JOE: *(Gradually slumps on the seat beside Odili bending his head into his right hand. His eyes inspect Odili's body).* Thank God, you are alive. *(Springs to his feet towards the audience)* Wounded heroes! Fallen heroes! What other price do we have to pay? Odili, *(Odili looks at him)* forgive me; the message I bear gives no pleasure to the ears. *(Pause)* Comrades have gathered in the town of Abaga, not to mourn but to celebrate our hero, Maxwell Kulamo. He brought us together to save the poor masses from the mindless gang that has hijacked this great nation and has paid the ultimate price. Max is gone. Our dear and courageous Eunice is not there to wipe our tears or for us to wipe hers. She shot down Chief Koko, the murderer of Max and handed herself over to the police and is in their custody at the moment. Comrades have sent me to check your progress and leave you with this message that 'Max is gone but the struggle goes on.'

ODILI: *(Freezes. Then goes wild with a loud cry)* N-o! *(Joe tries to control Odili).*

Mr Samalu enters.

MR SAMALU: What is it? What is that, young man? Odili, what is it?

ODILI: *(In grief)* O Max...O Max.

MR SAMALU: What? That young man?

JOE: Yes, sir. They killed him.

MR SAMALU: *(Shocked)* Oh, no! Odili, you are not well: you must take it easy.

JOE: *(Pause as Odili nods his head gently).* Odili, I must take my leave back to Comrades.

Joe exits.

MR SAMALU: Such a brave young man. I remember that day he came to the hospital with a new nomination paper for you to sign.

ODILI: But where is my car? I must go to see Eunice.

MR SAMALU: Which car? Did I not tell you they burnt it?

ODILI: Why?

MR SAMALU: *(Shakes his head)* Yes, why? What do you remember? Tell me.

ODILI: *(Scratches his head).* That my car was dangerous or something.

MR SAMALU: They found five machetes and two double-barrelled guns. Therefore, the police kept you under arrest at the hospital until the case was withdrawn. Do you remember now?

ODILI: It's okay *(Scratches his head).*

MR SAMALU: *(Pause).* Poor boy! *(he shrugs).*

Mr Samalu exits.

Edna enters.

Odili and Edna remain silent looking at each other for a while.

ODILI: Congratulations! I will never contest his seat again. I am terribly sorry, Edna. But I will always remember that in that entire crowd you were the only one who tried to help me. *(Tears in Edna's eyes)*. Don't cry, please. Please, my love, don't. Come and sit here. *(Edna sits down but shifts a bit from him. Odili offers her handkerchief to wipe her tears but Edna uses her own. (Pause)*. Please forgive me for all the bad things I have said to you.

EDNA: Forgive you for saying the truth?

ODILI: Oh please, Edna, don't talk like that. I know how you feel...just that I didn't want you to go and marry that beast.

EDNA: *(Sober)*. I never wanted to marry him. It was my father. He has even sent me out of the house.

ODILI: Why?

EDNA: I have told him I am not going to marry that man.

ODILI: Is it by force you should marry a man you don't love?

EDNA: What about my mother's drugs, my school fees and the money the man has paid on my head. Is he going to steal?

ODILI: Edna, I am here for you. Even all that Nanga has paid on your head, I will refund him. *(Odili shifts towards her and tries to bring her head to rest on his chest but it is interrupted by Mr Samalu's entrance)*.

Mr Samalu enters.

EDNA: *(Stands respectfully)* Good day, sir.

MR SAMALU: Ah, my daughter, you have stayed away for so long. I began to think I frightened you?

EDNA: No, sir.

ODILI: What do you mean, father?

MR SAMALU: I told her I was going to marry her for one of my sons that day she spent the whole night with us at the hospital.

ODILI: So it wasn't a dream?

MR SAMALU: You and your dreams.

(Mr Samalu is going indoors).

ODILI: Papa, Edna's father has disowned her because she has refused to marry Nanga.

MR SAMALU: Nonsense! I will see your father, myself. Don't worry, my daughter. I know the custom.

Mr Samalu Exits:

A new colourful light.

ODILI: *(Turns and squeezes Edna's hands)*. Edna, let's talk about our future.

EDNA: What future?

ODILI: *(Pause)* A new nation! *(They stare at each other and are about to hug when a loud noise is heard on the street and martial music is heard over the radio. People are shouting and hailing the army. There has been a coup).*

Act 3: Scene 5

Afternoon. Urua village road.

Martial music. Chaos. The villagers are startled and confused. A villager runs in with the news.

1ST WOMAN: Army don take over gor'ment!

2ND WOMAN: They don take Nanga dem into prison.

1ST MAN: *(coming from the opposite direction)* Eeyi, they have finished eating

2ND WOMAN:...and drinking!

2ND MAN: *(mimes drinking)* But we are still drinking. *(Laughter).*

1ST WOMAN: They say them go make Odili minister o.

1ND MAN: Eh? You mean the young man will start eating?

2ND MAN: Gbam!

2ND WOMAN: Hurry! We must go to Odili to show our solidarity.

1ST WOMAN: So that when he eats...

ALL: We too will eat...

(They begin to chant Odili's praises as they leave).

Act 3: Scene 6

Samalu's Living Room.

Mr Samalu enters.

(The radio is playing martial music. There is air of disbelief and excitement).

MR SAMALU: Haa, I said it! That boy's death, Max; I said it that Chief Koko has taken so much for the blind owner to see.

ODILI: That's exactly what the people of Anata said about Josiah when stole the blind man's walking stick. But I am not really sure if this is good news - the army.

MR SAMALU: Well, for now it is good that the thieves are chased away. Let us watch and see what the strong man does after chasing away the robbers.

ODILI: I blame the people for this: they chose to vote in corrupt men.

SAMALU: We didn't vote for them. They took the power.

ODILI: Why didn't the people revolt? Why couldn't the people rise against the corrupt leaders as the village people of Anata did against Josiah the shopkeeper?

MR SAMALU: And what could they do about Josiah when Chief Nanga employed him? Let me tell you my son: the village has a mind and could say no to sacrilege, not the country; it belongs to nobody. Nobody wants to die. So, we can only follow those on top.

VILLAGERS: *(The people are heard offstage singing)*

Odili, Odili, Odili k'anyi ga-eso,
ma o na eje-eje ma o na alo-alo,
Odili k'anyi ga-eso'

(which means 'It's Odili we shall follow; whether he's going, whether he's coming, It's Odili we shall follow').

MR SAMALU: The people are coming to congratulate you. Why not go and put on your shirt?

ODILI: *(Slightly furious)* No! Let them see my wounds! It is their hypocrisy; their failure to unite against evil; their failure to fight for what is right. And now, they rejoice that the bullets have come to reign over them. Tell them to go and recover the power which belongs to them!

SAMALU: The poor people are helpless, my son. They are innocent victims of divide and rule.

(The people come on stage singing)

ODILI: *(Interrupts the singing immediately).* Poor innocent victims of divide and rule! Welcome! You take bribes and cast your votes for corrupt men. Yet you are poor and innocent. You are victims of divide and rule. When you allow yourselves to be divided, I ask you: are you not as much evil as they that divide you?

(He looks around as though he expects the people to respond).

Are you not?! Why do you jump like grasshoppers from one forest to another, adoring trees that rise above the forests and obstruct sunlight to the rest? There is only one salvation tree for you. To this tree only should you sing to follow: not Nanga, Koko or the Military Dictator. It is not to Odili that you should sing to follow: Instead, follow your collective and undivided will. ONE MIND!

Immediately, the big wooden gong, the bass drum and udu, the musical pot, all sound at the same time. A dance begins with a song of solidarity and resistance in Igbo. "Anyi si anyị agaghị ekwe, a ye ye ọfọ! 2x. Kwenu ikuku buru ha o! A ye ye ikuku buru ha o, a ye ye ọfọ!" 2x. Soldiers parade Nanga and the people are happy, dancing and singing. At the middle of the dance, a soldier pulls a female dancer to himself by force but she tries to resist and other dancers and villagers try to help her but the other soldiers get involved. They shoot recklessly, killing and scattering the people. They drag out those they have shot down. Then only soldiers are on stage.

COMMANDER: *(Takes the salute)* Attention!

Epilogue

They put on masks and execute the Dance sequence on

"We all wear masks... even the downtrodden"

The End

Chapter Three

STAGING OF THE PERFORMANCE SCRIPT AND AUDIENCE RESPONSE

Adaptation for performance on stage is a complex process¹⁶² in that the script alone does not tell the story. According to Hutcheon, it “entails a shift from a solo model of creation to a collaborative one.”¹⁶³ On stage, the director takes responsibility for what the audience will receive

because in stage productions as in cinema, the characteristic preoccupations, tastes, and stylistic trademarks of the director are what stand out and become identifiable, perhaps all directors should be considered at least potential adapters.¹⁶⁴

Directors are potential adapters, because, just as the script writer interprets the original text, so they interpret the drama script before creating or designing a performance. This chapter describes the steps I took and the observable ones taken by the director to put the adaptation on stage. I will also comment on the acting, the audience response and why I chose to revise the drama script for the Final Draft.

As an amateur dramatist, I wrote and directed the dramas like *Laments Hopes and Carols* (1994) and *Nkemakolam* (the first Odenigbo performance, 1996) but I knew it was not going to be the same with this adaptation which I wanted to be professionally directed. Part of my research when I travelled to Nigeria in early 2006 was not just to find a director who would be ready to help me put this on stage but also to find out if we have a director capable of putting our novel stories on stage. The proposal to adapt the novels to stage does not end with script writing and commentary but involves this type of research – finding out if we have the material and human resources to actualise this proposal. I had to go in search of a professional director; otherwise, I would have made use of any director available or even opted to direct it myself. After some inquiries, the arrows were pointing towards one person, Toni Duruaku. Though he had resigned from the State Council for Arts and Culture, he was still being referred to by Jude Eke, the director for the drama department at the State Council. I eventually came

¹⁶² Hutcheon, L, Ibid, p.83

¹⁶³ Ibid, p.80

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p.84

in contact with Duruaku through the recommendation of Professor Nwabueze at Nsukka. He called Duruaku from Nsukka immediately I finished my interview with him and told him that he was sending me to him for the purpose of directing the adaptation.

I met with Duruaku in April 2006 and after some dialogue concerning the need for this production, his own schedule and other issues, he eventually agreed to help me stage the drama. Among other things, he saw with me, the rationale behind my proposal – that the reading culture was really very poor in the country. After that meeting I booked and had interview with him on the 6th of May, 2006 and I remained in communication with him when I came back to the UK to start writing the dialogue until we met again in November of that same year to begin preparations for the stage performance. Between June and November was not enough time for me to finalize my script despite the fact that I had made many changes to it, had a reading with a group of friends comprising playwrights, actors and journalists and sought their advice as well as that of my script supervisor, James Charlton. As Peter Brook said, “It is woefully difficult to write a play” as the playwright is required “to enter into the spirit of opposing characters.”¹⁶⁵ Duruaku, therefore, helped me to complete the drafting of a working script, which was used for performance.

One of his main contributions to the script was to increase the use of masks, deleting some scene breaks and using masking sequences to replace them. While at Owerri, I was always in communication with my supervisors and used email to send them whatever changes that we made to the script. James responded to the increase of masks as ‘overarching’. At first, I felt the frequency should be reduced but the director did not agree with that. I, however, reasoned that he, the director, understands the audience better and I trusted his judgment. Moreover, with all the arguments about Igbo masquerade theatre (detailed in Chapter Four), I thought the masks and masquerades should be fully used in this performance since post-colonial masquerading is more about entertainment than ritual. It was after the performance that I really appreciated the director’s decision and having reflected on the performance a number of times, I actually came to the conclusion that we needed to do a little more with the face masks.

¹⁶⁵ Brook, P, *The Empty Space*, London, Penguin, 1968, p.38

This is reflected in the Final Draft of the play, with Edna and Mrs Nanga playing a little bit more with face masks as in Act 2 Scenes 2 and 4 of the Final Draft. Once we felt we got a sizeable working script the director practically took charge of the production while I ran around in search of financial support.

In a situation where the director is working for a theatre company Trevor R Griffiths lists in *Stagecraft*, the duties of a director as: “Choosing and Reading the Play, Casting, Auditioning, Publicity, Rehearsing, Blocking, The Opening Night.”¹⁶⁶ In my case, all these, with the exception of choosing the play, were in the domain of the director even though we shared the responsibility for the publicity. Indeed, the director mentioned at a point when we were working on the script that if I had consulted him before choosing a text, that it would not have been *A Man of the People* because it is not straightforward and is the least admired of Achebe’s novels. He was thinking of adapting folk stories and not an Achebe novel.

The auditioning was thrown wide open to four tertiary institutions in and around Owerri, the Arts Council, Alvana Catholic Young Voices and the general public. It was very clear that my intention to hold the production in December was not feasible. However, the director was able to carry out the auditioning, casting and initial readings of the play before breaking for the Christmas period, giving individuals the chance to study the script. Everyone reconvened on the 16th of January 2007 and rehearsals began in earnest. Only one actor who was playing a major character, Edna, did not return. The director and I sought replacements and we succeeded in getting two and he double cast the role of Edna and that of other major characters to forestall such disappointments. He began with the blocking of scenes and at the same time brought a choreographer, Chris Nwaru, on board. It was Nwaru who helped to create the movement of the maskers and he provided the initial melodic draft which I had to work on with Ruth Opara to produce the theme music for the performance.

The director also invited other artists to play their parts in the production. These included a group of cultural musicians to rehearse with the actors in order to supply live instrumentation when needed; a visual artist whose work was to sculpt maskheads to be

¹⁶⁶ Griffiths, T (Ed), *Stagecraft: The Complete Guide to Theatrical Practice*, London, Phaidon, 1982, p.9

used by maskers and to provide an abstract painting based on the concept of masking to be pasted on the two sides of the stage; a makeup artist came from the neighbouring State, Abia, to see the actors and know what was required. The stage and lighting manager, Molinta Enendu, travelled from the far away University of Calabar to design the stage with the director towards the production date. While the choreographer, the stage and lighting manager and the actors took their cue both from the drama script and the director, the other artists had nothing to do with my drama script but only relied on what the director asked them to do.

Those details substantiated Hutcheon's statement that adaptation is a complex and collaborative process. This is not only about adaptation but about every theatre production as in the words of Howard Barker "We grew ashamed of the I in the theatre and learned to talk of the We. Rightly, because the art is collective...."¹⁶⁷ It is not only collaborative but also complex, because after the playwright has built the whole scaffold of dialogue by 'scening',¹⁶⁸ the director's job is to dismantle it so that it can pass through the doors of the theatre house where he then puts the parts down on the stage and rebuilds the scaffold. For the rebuilding, the director has his own notes, which he follows to put up the scaffold again to fit the theatre stage. The writer can begin building the story sequentially from Act 1 Scene 1, why the director can chose to block Act 3 Scene 3 first. This is why Schechner makes a distinction between drama and script.

Drama is tight, verbal narrative; it allows for improvisation; it exists as a code independent of any individual transmitter; it is, or can easily be made into, a written text. A script – which can be either tight or loose – is either a plan for a traditional event...or it is developed during rehearsals to suit a specific text as in orthodox western theatre.¹⁶⁹

Looking at the changes which my director made to the script, the notes and the diagrams he attached to different parts of the drama, his mapping out a programme of progression which includes the auditioning, the reading of the play and blocking of scenes; the times that he invites one artist or the other to play his own part as well as

¹⁶⁷ Barker, H, *Arguments for Theatre* (3rd ed), Manchester, Manchester Uni Press, 1997, p.20

¹⁶⁸ Schechner, R, *Ibid*, p.78

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p.94

organising production meetings, assigning different functions to members of the cast towards the production week, all typed out and kept inside the production file, then it becomes clear that the director's script is different from that of the playwright. The 'script' according to Schechner is the interior mapping of the production plan¹⁷⁰ which is in the domain of the director. This script is not expected to be as rigid as a drama text but rather dynamic, to adapt to changes and discoveries on daily basis. According to Brook, "a director who comes to the first rehearsal with his script prepared with the moves and business, etc. noted down, is a real deadly theatre man."¹⁷¹ From my observation during the rehearsals for the staging of this adaptation, Duruaku was as dynamic as possible. He had his own notes but always allowed the actors to take initiatives regarding their moves, elocution and visual interpretation of the text during rehearsals. He made corrections when necessary but for some scenes he had to spell out the actors' positions and movements from the start. That, to me, did not amount to dictatorial directing, which, as Turner has observed, "the rehearsal process" for postmodern directors like Schechner and Grotowski discourages¹⁷², because in the end, he, the director, takes responsibility for what happens on stage. There was enough freedom for the actors to be themselves and make their inputs and the cooperativeness among the performers was fostered through physical exercises, dancing and singing. (See Fig.1 below).



Fig.1. Bonding of performers through physical exercises.

I had no intention of interfering with the rehearsals but on two occasions I had to express my own concerns. First was to the actor playing the role of Max whom I spoke to privately, telling him to recognise the import of the line, "Information is key to social change" (Act 1 Scene 4) because information is not only the motive behind my proposal for stage adaptations, it is also the theme I am giving attention in *Kingdom of*

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.87

¹⁷¹ Brook, P, Ibid, p.119

¹⁷² Turner, V, Ibid, p.119

the Mask. He took my advice and began to stress that line for other rehearsals and during the actual performances.

The second concern I had was the relationship between Edna and Odili towards the end. I wanted to depart from the issue of marriage between these characters and I sent a memo to the director to that effect. I suggested that when Odili proposes marriage to Edna (Act 4 Scene 3), that the latter should not bend her head, which signals acceptance, as he (Duruaku) directed, but she should turn and look straight to the direction of the audience. I told him that I didn't want to continue the idea that all that a woman wants in our society is marriage in this contemporary world. When next we met, he retorted 'if they (women) don't want marriage, what else do they want?', and left it that way. I was not convinced but did not want to engage in an argument that could adversely affect the production. Other than the areas mentioned above, the director controlled the rehearsals and in his absence he always mandated one of his two assistants to take charge of the proceedings.

Sometimes, the rehearsals took place on the stage inside the auditorium of AICE while at other times we made use of lecture rooms or worked outside, somewhere in the compound. The rehearsals, which started on the 16th of January, went on until the 10th of February before the director felt comfortable enough to announce that the production would be on the 20th and 22nd of February. Then, everyone involved in the performance also got involved in publicising the dates. We used flyers and posters to schools, churches, internet cafés and offices. We also made use of the State Channel of Nigerian Televisions Authority to preview the performance. Actors did not concern themselves with acting only; they also performed other duties as requested by the director, choreographer or me to ensure successful performances.



Fig. 2. (Left) Actors preparing the costume for the masquerade under the supervision of the Choreographer. Chris Nwaru (middle).

Stage and Staging

After agreeing to direct this adaptation, Duruaku asked me to travel around the South East of Nigeria and see where we have a theatre that can take the production. I travelled to all the places the director sent me to take a look at theatres and stages, including University of Calabar, but eventually I settled for the stage inside the auditorium of Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri. The stage, from a theatre point of view, can be described as a merely raised platform with a big curtain like a proscenium. The audience area is a flat floor with scanty seats and the building bears scars of negligence with some broken doors and windows. Imo State University on the other hand, had a better theatre building with raked seating just like Rosy Arts Theatre inside Owerri town, which, as Duruaku pointed out in my interview with him, was not built for dramatic performances. There is no depth to the stage in Rosy Arts Theatre at all. However, I had to choose Alvan auditorium for two major reasons. Firstly, it is a familiar terrain, my having been a chaplain at the college while working with Alvana Catholic Young Voices. Secondly, it has a community life setting with student hostels located inside the College compound. I wrote to the Provost of the college, C N Uwazuruike, requesting to use the auditorium for this purpose and my request was granted.

The director and the stage designer decided to put up fixed flats on the main stage to give the stage the shape of a living room and annex a dynamic platform which protrudes towards the audience with steps in the middle through which one can also climb onto the main stage. (See Fig.3 below).



Fig.3: Front of stage before (left) and during (right) construction.

This additional platform was where the exterior scenes were to take place in order to minimise changes to the main stage where interior scenes were played. We could say there were two main acting areas but there was the third, which practically dissolved the distance between the spectators and the actors. This is the space between the apron and the audience, the ordinary floor of the auditorium, which was used by the hawkers who presented their commodities to the audience to buy and the masquerades whose performance ethos is motion. The political rallies also extended into this neutral area and indeed, into the audience area, from where Odili was dragged to the front by Nanga's thugs and the audience reaction at that point showed that they felt they were part of the action. Further than that, a stronger relationship was developed between the actors and the spectators through the live instrumentalists who, sitting in the spectators' area, became both performers and spectators. Even the performer who sang live during the confrontational dance is also the actor who played the hawker and the 1ST Man and he sang from among the audience. I was happy with this outcome because my wish to get the audience involved by including elements of traditional theatre into the adaptation was being realised. The design took cognisance of the fact that stage design like other elements of a performance "must work in unison."¹⁷³

The division of the performance areas for the interior and the exterior was an important structure that worked in cohesion with the form of the play. While I was writing the script I consciously had the physical structure of the drama arranged, so that actions do not move from one house to another house (the interior) without an action on the exterior as scene breaker. This is an organisational device to allow time for possible changes to be made to the set on the main stage (where actions inside the houses were played) without having to make the audience wait. The Igbo can be very impatient and it is possible to play before a full hall at the beginning and get a near empty hall before the end. I focused on three houses from the novel for the stage and these are Nanga's residence in Bori, Nanga's village house in Anata and Odili's (Mr Samalu's) house in Urua and the actions in these houses took place in the sequence I have listed them here..

¹⁷³ Griffiths, T, Ibid, p.73

For the interior, two sets of door blinds were bought and were tailored to the stage doors to help the audience to make a visual distinction between the three houses because furniture practically remained the same. These were used for the first day

performance, one set for Nanga's house in Bori and another set for Mr Samalu's (Odili's) house while Nanga's house in the village, which is between the other two, had no curtains. The door blinds really simulated a living room. Unfortunately, the colours of the door blinds were very close to each other – blue and violet – and did not show much difference between the two houses. For that reason, for the second day performance, the director decided not to use the door blinds again but rather he used A3 sized papers to stack on the stage walls (flats): two papers of violet colour (symbol of affluence) for Nanga's house and two yellow papers (symbol of enlightenment and inspiration) for Odili's house. It was now left for the audience to play their own semiotic roles in interpreting the colours.



Fig. 4: Nanga's house (left), Odili introduces Elsie to Nanga; Odili/Samalu's house (right), Samalu welcomes Nanga.

While writing the drama script, I had a visual picture of an extension to the stage, as the director and stage designer later decided, but I could not propose this to the director because I was operating on a very low budget. At one point I had thought of approaching the staging with Jerzy Grotowski's *Poor Theatre* modality, to eliminate all that is incapable of impeding performance. As Pickering points out, whenever possible, Grotowski reduces "reliance on any element other than the actor himself".¹⁷⁴ Of course, Igbo traditional dance and masquerade theatres relied mainly on the performers

¹⁷⁴ Pickering, K, *Key Concepts in Drama and Performance*, NY, Palgrave (Macmillan), 2005, p.148

and the spectators because performances took place in the open air as Okagbue observes.

All it takes for performance to take place is the presence of the performer and spectators to transform an ordinary space into a symbolically charged performance space. This in a way predates Peter Brook's (1969) idea of the 'empty space'. Igbo masquerade theatre, like most African theatres, seems to suggest that a performance will always find and define its space, once the other two elements are present and willing to engage with each other. The masking theatre does not depend on scenery or previously defined stage.¹⁷⁵

In *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook argues that

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space while some else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.¹⁷⁶

While these lines from Brook make a good reading, the concept was rather very difficult to apply in my own circumstance. Obviously, a stage with the barest minimum of set would have been my choice due to financial constraints, but my understanding of the mindset of my audience shelved that idea. I knew my audience would be expecting a well built stage from someone who has come back from Overseas to produce a play. "Father has come home for a production and I can assure you he is fully loaded" was one of the statements used to introduce me to a group of artists when earlier in 2006 (April – June) I visited to find out the state of the theatre in Igbo land. Fortunately, my eventual director knew I was not 'fully loaded' and was indeed wary of artists who were going to get involved for the sake of money. He took it upon himself to explain to those who would like to get involved the nature of my production and why they would have to offer their services voluntarily.

On the other hand, my director knew that though we could appeal to the actors and disabuse their minds regarding huge remuneration, we were not going to disabuse the mind of the audience from what they expected. We needed our audience to take us seriously and for them to do so, considering the ideas of Grotowski or Brook or even

¹⁷⁵ Okagbue, O, Ibid, p.44

¹⁷⁶ Brook, P, *The Empty Space*, London, Penguin, 1968, p.12

what Robert Kavanagh calls 'People's Theatre' in staging the adaptation was out of the question. The People's Theatre, much like Grotowski's poor theatre (and Brook's 'empty space'), advocates as a general rule, "little or no access to lighting and sound; inadequate budgets for costumes, props, and musical instruments; and little formal theatre skills training."¹⁷⁷ With students making up around eighty percent of the cast, the director was working with people with little formal theatre skills training; dance costumes were borrowed for free from Imo State Arts Council and individuals; the sound system was also borrowed from Alvana Catholic Young Voices and St Lazarus Catholic Chaplaincy, Owerri Federal Prisons. We could get around so many things needed for the production, like three hundred seats freely donated by AICE Catholic Chaplaincy for the audience and the electric generator from the State Commissioner for Public Utilities. These enabled us to save some money for stage construction, lighting and props (eg carving of face masks in particular), to impress upon the mind of our audience a performance that means to say something serious.

The high expectations of the audience regarding presentation could be heard in the post- performance remark by a staff of the college when he said he was donating five thousand naira (equivalent of twenty pounds) for the troupe to improve its costumes. I understood that to mean the dance costumes, because the realist approach meant that all the characters dressed according to their social status except for Mrs Nanga, whose non-flashy dressing alludes to her being 'too bushy' for the Minister .

As though he were writing with my audience in mind and for an Igbo world where the State has left theatres in ruins, Brecht writes that, "If the Theatre is capable of showing the truth, then it should be capable of making the sight of it a pleasure".¹⁷⁸ In view of this, to improve the scenery and to a reasonable extent satisfy audience expectations, I hired a lighting manager and his lighting equipment from far away Calabar. The lighting effects were appreciated by the audience, especially during the Christmas masquerade dance (Act 2 Scene 2); the lighting was colourful and shimmery, which enhanced the stimulating dance and movements of the masquerades.

¹⁷⁷ Kanavagh, R M, *Making People's Theatre*, Johannesburg, Witwatersrand Uni Press, 2001, p.3

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, p.209



Fig. 5: Christmas Maquerades dance.

On the other hand, because the lighting manager could not rehearse with the actors, due to distance and issues surrounding security in the Auditorium*, there were times when the lighting objectives were not achieved during the performance. An example was during the dialogue between Odili and Max in Act 1 Scene 4. While the actor playing the character of Max was trying to keep to his movements and positions as rehearsed, he took no notice of the spotlight and could not adjust to the light. In spite of that, the use of stage lights as against the bare electric bulbs in the Auditorium, obviously, made a great difference in the aesthetic appreciation of the staging of the adaptation.

Applying the Mask and Other Igbo Theatrical Elements

It is good to observe that Achebe did not leave these cultural forms out of the novel either. Dance, music and re-enactment of hunting games all featured in welcoming Chief Nanga to Anata (pp 1 -2) and during his political campaign (p.136). He uses the masquerade dance at Christmas (pp. 96-97) metaphorically to condemn the political ‘masquerades’ that are uncontrollably corrupt. A corrupt masquerade, in essence, is ironic because masquerades in pre-colonial Igbo society were political agents, performing religious and social duties. Their spiritual (religious) dimension, symbolized by the rope tied around their waists,¹⁷⁹ controlled their social dimensions and therefore they knew how to behave even with their ‘outsized matchets’. Even as colonization and Christianity did so much harm to the restraining rope of religion that it ‘came undone’, Achebe observes that the traditional masquerades were still guided by the moral principles of traditional religion.

* The Auditorium had broken doors and windows; lighting equipment could not be fixed and left there overnight. Of course the lighting manager arrived with the equipment very late into Owerri from Calabar and could not take part in the dress rehearsal.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Killam G D, *The Writings of Chinua Achebe*, Ibid, pp.87-88

While the Mask danced here and there brandishing an outsized matchet the restraining rope round his waist came undone. One might have expected this sudden access to freedom to be followed by a wild rampage and loss of life and property. But the Mask tamely put his matchet down, helped his disciples retie the rope, picked up his weapon again and resumed his dance. (p.97)

In contrast, the ‘political masquerades’ (the Nangas and the Kokos) of the post-independence era no longer feel the force of the restraining rope of religion as they now operate in the new ‘shrine of politics’¹⁸⁰ as Robert Wren observed. In my adaptation, there are two types of masquerade performances – the social and the political. The social (Act 2 Scene 2) is linked to Christmas, a Christian religious feast, a vivid manifestation of the hybridity of Igbo culture. Considering that dance and life are interwoven in Igbo culture as observed in Chapter One, there is a sense in which the Igbo establish occasions and festivities as part and parcel of Igbo life through cultural dancing. Azubuike Ifionu is of the same opinion when he says that the use of instruments and music validates social institutions in Igbo land.¹⁸¹ Linked to Christianity, which was one of the agencies of the demystification of the masquerade system, the performance is meant to be pure entertainment, as Francis Ndu Anike observes when he writes that “there are masquerades in Igbo society designed simply to entertain the audience. These are mostly those that have been transposed to the new cities and function around the Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter.”¹⁸²

Yet, I used the masquerade during Christmas to symbolise Odili’s penetration into Nanga’s house, pretending to be a good friend both to Mrs Nanga and Edna in order to destroy Nanga’s marital engagement to Edna. The disguise of the actors in trying to outwit one another is also reflected in the accompanying music which says everyone is wearing a mask, that “this (our) world is a masquerade”.

The second type of masquerade performance is the political performance, and that is why it is designated as ‘confrontational dance’ (Act 3 Scene 4). It introduces series of

¹⁸⁰ Wren, R, *Achebe’s World*, London, Longman, 1980, p.96

¹⁸¹ Ifionu, A O, “The Role of Music in Igbo Culture: An Ethnomusicological Explanation”, in Emenanjo, E N & Ogbalu, F C, *Igbo Language and Culture* (Vol 2), Ibadan, University Press Limited, 1982. p.45

¹⁸² Anike, F N, ‘The Significance of Igbo Masquerade’, (Conference Paper, African Theatre Association), Goldsmith University, London, August 31, 2007.

confrontations between Nanga’s camp and Odili’s camp. The script direction says “*Edna confronts Odili as the masquerades depart*” indicating that the antagonisms begin immediately. In the next scene, (Act 3 Scene 5) Nanga orchestrates the sack of Odili’s father as a local chairman of POP and his tax increment. The confrontations climax in the physical attack on Odili by Nanga and his men in Act 3 Scene 7, which is the last scene of Act 3. The masquerades, here, symbolize the political bigwigs – Nanga and Odili.

A cultural dance (Fig. 6) is used to introduce Nanga’s political rally, to underscore that Odili’s and Max’s campaign has made little or no impact on the people: they still dance for Nanga. This proves Odili right when he later tells his father, “I blame the people” (Act 4 Scene 5).



Fig. 6: Dance at Nanga’s political campaign.



Fig.7: *Uga* game: celebrating Nanga’s victory.

In Act 4 Scene 2, an Igbo recreational game named *uga* (Fig. 7) played by four youths, is employed to celebrate Nanga’s victory. I consider this game appropriate for the celebration of the ‘recycled’ minister who returns to power through rigged election. In this game, which is peculiar to young girls, the players face each other, throwing out their legs against each other in a very fast but rhythmic pattern and clapping their hands to generate the rhythm for the movement of the legs. For a male observer, it is always very confusing to know who has won a point or the whole game but the girls know. This game, in which an outsider can hardly understand how the players win or lose, symbolizes the election which the ordinary people know little or nothing about. I wanted to use locution and hybrid language to add to the game’s puzzling profile as we can read from the following extract:

2nd VILLAGER: (*clears his voice and the other turns towards him with surprise looks*) I heard/
 3rd VILLAGER: No, they said
 4th VILLAGER: ...the young woman (*looks at the other to agree*)
 3rd VILLAGERS: (*nod in agreement*) Yes, the young woman.
 2nd VILLAGER: ...stayed with the young man in the hospital, all night.
 1st, 3rd, 4th VILLAGERS: Uh-uh!
 4th VILLAGER: They said...
 2ND VILLAGER: Oh no, you heard.
 1ST VILLAGER: They said, I heard.
 3rd VILLAGER: Yes, drive forward.
 1ST VILLAGER: ...the police were guarding the young man like a president/
 2ND VILLAGER: No, like a prisoner until Nanga won the election.
 3rd VILLAGER: Call him Chief.
 4th VILLAGER: And Honourable...
 1ST VILLAGER: ...yes, reappointed Minister!
 ALL: (*shout and stand*) O yes, we have recycled! Ebebe ebebe!
 We have recycled – Ebebe ebebe!
 We have recycled – Ebebe ebebe!
 We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

The language here is meant to be satirical and ironic while the actions are very playful. This is to paint the picture of a people who are resigned to their fate, yet are critical of the state of things, but more importantly, do not want to be held responsible for any particular statement. The scene begins and ends with a hybrid song – ‘We have recycled’ (‘We must recycle’) and the chorus is in Igbo ‘Ebebe Ebebe’ meaning ‘Forever and ever’ – a practice that so much reflects contemporary Igbo pop music which mystifies the listener with a crossbreed of language and style.

There is nothing as mystifying as Nigerian elections, which can be simultaneously comic, tragic and saddening. For the corrupt Nigerian politician, it is Machiavellian principle of the end justifying the means that reigns supreme; politics is only a game and it doesn’t matter how you win, even if you kill. As Soyinka rightly points out, the scale of political assassinations in Nigeria in the last ten years has been unprecedented.¹⁸³ For the ordinary people, all they know is to follow whoever wins, without questioning how he won. To ridicule the people’s sycophancy I made the villagers sing the same praise song for Nanga and for Odili. The song originated in the

¹⁸³ Soyinka, quoted in news article, “Obasanjo, a Hypocrite, Says Soyinka” in The Guardian, Sunday, March 7, 2010 <http://odili.net/news/source/2010/mar/7/14.html>

early 1980s and adapts the name of the praised to the music. In Act 4 Scene 1, the people sing the song for Nanga who, after voting, sprays money into the air causing the villagers to scramble for money while the ballots boxes are exchanged as in Josiah exchanging the blind man's stick. While the blind man noticed that his stick has been exchanged in spite of the rice he was given, the people here do not notice but rather scramble for the crumbs falling from the rich man's table while singing:

Nanga, Nanga, Nanga k'anyi g'eso; / ma o n'eje-eje, ma o n'alo-
alo, / Nanga k'anyi g'eso.
(Translation: 'Nanga, we shall follow; whether he goes, whether
he comes, Nanga we shall follow'). (Video, Clip 7).

However, when the army takes over government and there are whispers that Odili will become a minister, the people go to identify with him with the same song, erasing Nanga for Odili.

VILLAGERS: (*The people are heard offstage singing*)
Odili, Odili, Odili k'anyi ga-eso,
ma o na eje-eje ma o na alo-alo,
Odili k'anyi ga-eso. (Video, Clip 9).

There is a ring of sycophancy around this song. However, if the people are well enlightened, they would know 'who to follow'; and from my own point of view, it is their collective and undivided will that they must be thought to follow at all times.

These are some of the cultural elements I included in the adaptation because they constitute the major difference between what is *read* (the novel) and what is *seen* and *heard* (the drama) in the story, since the structure, the plot, characters and language basically remained the same as in the novel. Bringing these elements into literary drama will assist the intellectuals in our society to reinterpret them and renew their values for society.

In fact, a closer look at these traditional elements of Igbo theatre suggests that the argument of whether traditional Igbo theatre is drama was not necessary. For me, it is both drama and not drama. It is drama because most Igbo dances including the masquerade dance tell stories without a written script and create meaning. In most

cases, they tell of the life of the community that created them. It is not drama because negligence of our art forms over the years has resulted in the loss of meanings and our indigenous theatrical art forms do not speak to the people as drama normally does. They are only received as ordinary entertainments. Most Igbo dancers who take part in the cultural dances today probably have no inkling regarding their *raison d'être* and the meanings they traditionally generate. A few years ago, the founder of African Dance and Theatre Association (ADANTA), a dance troupe in the UK, expressed surprise that in most places they went for school workshops, people asked them the meaning of their movements, including their hand and eye gestures. For our generation, these gestures may particularly not mean anything beyond performance aesthetics but they may not have been so from the beginning, in the hands of the original creators of those dances. Even if on the other hand, performance aesthetics was all that those gestures meant for the creators of those dances, it is good to realise that the Igbo have always left their children to grow up to make their own meanings out of life as in the *Mbari* art system. This approach has got the advantage of helping to avoid disagreements over meaning within a community, which could arise from the distortions of oral transmission. In order to speak to the 'common ears' of a community, it is very important to avoid wrong interpretations and disagreements in the making of meanings, especially in music and dance, which function to unify a community. As Ifionu rightly pointed out, when the Igbo perform their cultural music

they are imbued with the spirit of oneness, satisfied that they are participating in musical activities which they are familiar with, which they value and cherish very much. In this way their musical activities do not only entertain people but they also unify and integrate all Igbo people living in that community.¹⁸⁴

In other words, one may not be completely wrong to attribute the noticeable extreme-individualism among the Igbo today to a malfunctioning theatrical system – the masquerade, the dance and folk music, the games, story and moonlight plays. My argument is that in modern Igbo society, these cultural performances, where they exist are not taken seriously and left on their own, they have no voices and voice is a sign of life. Their death lies in the fact that it is still the brutal capitalist politicians who hire the cultural dance troupes for a paltry sum to validate their campaigns and ceremonies. Our

¹⁸⁴ Ifionu, A O, Ibid, p.44

people don't seem to understand: that they can speak through those performances; that they could, for instance, perform *Eshe*, a dance for the dead, for a wicked politician, unlike the joyful dance performed for Nanga in my adaptation (only that *Eshe* is performed at the death of a life worth celebrating). It is my opinion that the modern theatre of defined space, working with Western dramatic pattern, can help these traditional forms of performances to find their voices and send them back into the communities to speak for the people. The dances, the songs and the games will sound more eloquent than individual voices because it is in their nature to unify the people. Unlike Odili at the beginning of the novel, 'who does not care too much about our women's dancing' (p.1), the intellectuals, the literary artists therefore have the duty of not only reinterpreting the theatrical elements but also re-educating the people to 'wield the cultural elements as weapons', as Boal might say. This is what I suppose Community Theatre or Theatre for Development can do for the Igbo society. The people's common will can be developed more easily when the people discover that the weapon they need is not in the capitalist's market but is already in their hands.

The Acting

The director was working with the theme of duplicity, employing the mask concept as a metaphor. According to him,

Having determined the dubious nature of the two men (Odili and Nanga), I began to see the same quality manifesting in some other significant characters....

Clearly, no character was quite what he seems. If so many characters in the play carry the same kind of baggage, I put them in one basket—duplicity. They are all pretenders.¹⁸⁵

Duruaku in his analysis of the characters seemed to have failed to detect that his knowledge of the original text, *A Man of the People*, was playing on his mind. For instance, in his conference paper, "Medium and Meaning", in analysing Odili as a conceited character, he made reference to Odili's earlier desire of Edna before the Bori incident, which he now uses as excuse to covet her; he mentioned Odili's affair with

¹⁸⁵ Duruaku, ABC, "Medium and Meaning: A Stage Director's Interpretation of Chinua Achebe's 'A Man of the People'", (A paper sent from Owerri for presentation at African Theatre Association Conference in Northampton) August, 2009, pp.8-9

Jean the American and other incidents in the novel that diminish Odili's integrity¹⁸⁶, which I consciously avoided. By eliminating some of those incidents, I knew I was modifying Odili's character in writing the script because I intended to get my audience on his side as quickly as possible and present Nanga as the aggressor. However, I still gave enough clues for my reader to know that Odili is also a pretender. Despite the Act 2 scenes 1 and 3 where he tries to deceive Mrs Nanga and Edna, in Act 1 Scene 4, for example, Max asks him why he accepted Nanga's invitation despite his dislike for the Minister.

MAX: I know you dislike the man so much for his crooked politics. So, why did you come to accept his invitation?

ODILI: Well, I had already planned to come to Bori this Christmas holidays to see Elsie. Again, I deserve a government scholarship which will help me to improve my status.

Odili starts his answer with "well", which in this case is an expression of doubt to show that he does not really believe in his response. In Act 3 Scene 4, Edna ends her confrontation with Odili thus, "See you, mask wearer... everybody has seen your face." All these indicate that Odili has been covering up, especially, in his dealing with Mrs Nanga and Edna. The difference between my approach to the characters' duplicitous attitude and the director's approach lies in the fact that I argue that the characters are influenced by the world they live in, governed by the likes of Nanga, while he, the director's approach implies that it is in their character to pretend; Nanga is not the only culprit. Hence, his working title for the play was *A Season of Masks* until I decided on *Kingdom of the Mask* based on my own conviction. However, we both agreed that everyone was masking and the mask concept was the appropriate metaphor to express our interpretations of the text. This shows how versatile the mask can be as a theatre prop, providing different interpretations for different people. Mask could be a sign of duplicity and dishonesty; it could be a call to knowledge and enlightenment. As Griffiths shows in *Stagecraft* with pictures of two different stage productions, uniform masks can be used on one occasion to create a sense of unison and on another occasion, to create confusion.¹⁸⁷ For *Kingdom of the Mask*, the masks had different looks (Fig. 8) and, of course, we mask for different reasons (Act 2 Scene 3).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p.8

¹⁸⁷ Griffiths, T, Ibid, p.125.



Fig. 8: Maskers with different face masks during a rehearsal.

In this adaptation, masking is more or less a challenge to the audience to seek knowledge and enlightenment as reflected in the theme song or sound image of the production.

<i>Ị marala m</i>	Do you know me...
<i>Ị marala m</i>	Do you know me...
<i>Ị marala onye m bụ?</i>	Do you really know who I am?

The melody noted above was used for every masking sequence beginning with the prologue of choreographed movement of maskers, through the scene breakers to the epilogue, which replicates the prologue with some variations (Fig 9. *Also see video Clip 1*). The theme melody provided the rhythm for the movement of the maskers but challenged the audience all the more by masking the lyrics through humming until the confrontational dance of the masquerades when the words became known. (*See video Clip 5*).



Fig. 9: The Prologue (left) and the Epilogue (right). (*See video Clip 1*)

Like the masking sequence, other cultural elements in the adaptation were also well realised. The masquerade dance at Christmas (*see video Clip 2*) was electrifying and the confrontational dance was also very entertaining but more symbolic as the masquerades

represent the contesting politicians. Applied as a didactic tool, the opposing masquerades danced for the public (audience) one after the other before charging at each other and ending their meeting, dancing. Their dances were like manifestos, acknowledging the importance of serving the public and making them happy over selfish aggrandizement. The scene teaches politicians that though they can challenge each other, they can do so without causing physical harm. The dance at Chief Nanga's rally was choreographed with moments of individual artistry which really got the audience cheering. The joyful nature of the dance and the individual artistry similar to the 'invitational' or attractive hip wiggling of *Nkwa Di Kwere Nwanyi* (*Agbachaa Ekuru Nwa*)¹⁸⁸, reveals the people's validation of Nanga's candidacy. (Video Clip 6).

The game with which the village youths celebrated Nanga's return to power was played for laughs. The director increased the comic effect not only through the use of masks but also by including a male player in the game, which, in the cultural setting, is only played by young girls. The male player was not just a member of the team but like Nanga and the less literate politicians, leads in a game in which he is supposed to be a spectator. I was satisfied with the director's and actors' stage interpretations of the cultural elements which I suggest should feature in future adaptations, where they are relevant to a particular story or theme.

For the actions propelled by dialogue, the actors, generally, did their best to interpret their lines, with one or two flaws. It was difficult not to be drawn by Nanga's physical vitality and charisma as expressed by the actor, Gregory Ogbonna, a lecturer at AICE. His interpretation of his lines confirms critics' claim that one can only fully understand the written text if you have experienced it in performance, because of the link between thought and action.¹⁸⁹ In Act3 Scene2, for instance, there is a repetition of Nanga's lines when he tells Odili for the second time

Take that money and take your scholarship to go and learn more
book; the country needs experts like you and...leave the dirty
game of politics to us who know how to play it.... Mm?

¹⁸⁸ *Nkwa Di Kwere Nwanyi* (The Promise of a Husband to his Woman) and *Agbachaa Ekuru Nwa* (A Child Bearing Dance or A Dance that Provokes Child Bearing) are two names that allude to one thing – marital intimacy – used to refer to a particular dance around the Ngor/Okpala-Owerri area of Igbo land. It is generally known today among the Igbo as *Egwu Ukwu* (Waist Dance). It is a dance for joyful occasions.

¹⁸⁹ Pickering, *Studying Modern Drama*, Ibid, p.4

Reading the lines on the page, one might ask: why repeat this? On the other hand, experiencing the actor's take on the lines, one can see that Nanga is making an effort to bring Mr Samalu to an overt agreement that he is an active participant in this 'dirty' game of politics. While saying it for the first time and walking behind Mr Samalu, the latter only nods, probably, to feign agreement. Nanga is not satisfied with that and he finds another opportunity when sitting beside Mr Samalu to draw him into full agreement. He therefore points his index finger back and forth to indicate that 'us' in that statement includes Mr Samalu, the local Chairman of POP. Towards the end of the line, he brings out his hand for Mr Samalu to shake in solidarity and agreement of what he has said, which the latter could not resist. (*Video Clip 3*).

Experiencing the vocal dynamics and gestures surrounding the use of these lines, one agrees with Grotowski that "the text per se is not theatre, that it becomes theatre only through the actors' use of it – that is to say, thanks to intonations, to the association of sounds, to the musicality of the language."¹⁹⁰ All these – vocal dynamics and gestures – interweave with the actors' lines to present a third level of adaptation, which is the actors' interpretation of the text. The first level is the script by the writer. The second level is the decisions taken by the director. The third is what we actually see the actors do on stage, sometimes discarding the words in the text and at other times, introducing their own words and exploring their creative impulse. In the genesis of adaptation as collaborative effort, therefore, Fry reminds us that the actors also need to be acknowledged.¹⁹¹ Indeed, some actors made significant contributions to the production of the play, using their natural talents and knowledge to accentuate the performance. Oscar Amaechi's traditional musical skill, for instance, was very handy for the confrontational dance. He is the same actor playing the Hawker and the 1st Man. For the confrontational dance, he sang from the position of the instrumentalists, using a song that invokes the four gods of Igbo land – eke, orie, afọ, nkwọ – mentioned in Chapter One, to introduce one of the masquerade parties. Interpretatively, the song offers moral and spiritual edge to the masquerade party introduced with it over the other, which is introduced with the theme music. In other words, the gods have already been made to take sides with one party before the confrontation. In the Final Draft, I

¹⁹⁰ Grotowski, J, *Towards a Poor Theatre*, p.21

¹⁹¹ Fry, M, *Ibid.*

have adapted this song to introduce the four gods as witness to the confrontation to put them in the position of impartial observers. These gods in Igbo traditional society are normally invoked as witnesses in the settlement of cases and oath takers invoke their names to validate their oaths and testify to their innocence. In his adaptation of *Arrow of God*, Nwabueze, uses the four gods not only to introduce Ezeulu the chief priest of Ulu but also to testify that he is a powerful man.¹⁹² Amaechi's contribution is therefore another example of what an actor brings into the performance that makes adaptation a collaborative work.

The actress playing Mrs Nanga, freely interjected her lines with Igbo words and phrases which were not in the novel or my script, simulating natural speech like her husband, who uses Pidgin frequently. The actress must have taken her cue from the hybridity of the opening lines of her dialogue with Odili.

MRS NANGA: Who? *Onye?*

ODILI: (*Enters*) It's me, Odili. How are you, Mrs Nanga.

MRS NANGA: Ah ah! (*Hurries to the door and opens*) You are back already, everything alright?

ODILI: No problem, Mrs Nanga. My holiday plans changed and I had to come back.

MRS NANGA: Which one be that *kwa?*

ODILI: Nothing really, only there were some issues that arose in the school which I needed to sort out, especially with students' results and all that.

MRS NANGA: Oh, *oru oyibo!* (*White man's job!*) (*Calls out to her child*) Eddy! Eddy!

Like the actor playing the character of Mrs Nanga, other actors brought to the stage their own interpretations of their lines. For instance in Act 3 Scene 6, during the dialogue between two village men, from time to time, 1st Man interjects with a word that sounds like "Udunekuti!" (a meaningless word) and the audience became so interested that it turned into a chorus between the actor and the audience.

In some cases, there was over-acting by some actors in their roles. An example was Elsie's reaction when Nanga asked his house boy, Dogo, to show her his wife's bedroom where she would be staying (Act1 Scene2). Elsie was not meant to say

¹⁹² Nwabueze, E, (Movement One) *When the Arrow Rebounds* (New Ed), Enugu, Abic Books, 2005.

anything here in the script. A surprised look like Odili's would have been enough reaction but she chose to spring to her feet with a thundering 'What!?' This acting could be felt differently by other members of the audience; but from my perspective, a more realistic approach would have been to avoid such an over-exaggeration, for as Stanislavski observes there is need to act truly, basing the art of acting on the laws of nature and "in addition to the help of nature, a well worked-out psychological technique...."¹⁹³ It is in view of this that I think that the role of the director is necessary, especially in helping the actors to be mentally prepared for their performances, especially actors who are taking part in a big performance for the first time. Without curbing the actor's creative impulse, the director still has to make sure, as Brook would advise, that the play makes the right sound for "If you just let a play speak, it may not make a sound"¹⁹⁴, or make an embarrassing sound as in this case. Whatever the situation, I believe amateur actors should not be heavily criticised for 'striking false notes'¹⁹⁵ but should be continuously assisted in building their "concentration and imaginations" on which Trevor Griffiths argues their performances depend.

Acting is an extremely lonely activity. The actor performs in front of an audience and, despite all the experiences of rehearsal and the help given by the director, during the performance the actor stands alone". Perhaps the most important attributes of an actor are concentration and imagination, and the performance depends on how much is put into it.¹⁹⁶

Mostly, the actors tended to put in more into the performance than the rehearsals, probably because of audience presence. In most cases, that contributed to the force of the performance. For instance, during the actual performance, the Messenger from the Councillor to Mr Samalu (Act3 Scene 5) bent his right arm to simulate disability and kept pulling his trousers comically with the left hand while Mr Samalu read his letter. The audience laughed and chuckled at all his physical expressions which included constant stretching of his neck to see the content of Mr Samalu's letter. His action could be interpreted as mere comic entertainment, since Mr Samalu was reading the

¹⁹³ Stanislavski, C, Ibid , p.17

¹⁹⁴ Brook, P, Ibid, p.43

¹⁹⁵ Stanislavski, C, P. Ibid, p.159

¹⁹⁶ Griffiths, T (Consultant Ed), *Stagecraft: A Complete Guide to Theatrical Practice*, London, Phaidon, 1982, p.69

letter out. What we forget here is that in reality, Mr Samalu was not reading the letter out to anyone on stage but only to the audience. This is a well known stage convention, the ‘aside’ whereby the characters on stage are not supposed to hear what the audience is hearing.¹⁹⁷ So, the Messenger represented the world of reality and enriched the performance with his gestures, especially the stretching of his neck.



Fig. 10: Actor performs imbecility at the poll.

Another actor re-enacted the behavioural traits of an imbecile at the voting scene (Fig. 10) to which the audience roared with laughter and then applauded at his exit. None of these, including Odili’s sharp expression of pain when his father mistakenly touched his wounded arm (Act 4 Scene 3), were suggestions from the script or the director. What we see in these actions are actors bringing with them enormous creativity for which Brook thinks that the director does not have to come to the first rehearsal with as dogmatically prepared script of actors’ moves.¹⁹⁸ Considering that human beings are bundles of possibilities and are dynamic, Brook reminds us of the ‘fluctuating nature of the territory of manifestation and existence which the actor shares with the spectator’.¹⁹⁹ Audience presence, no doubt, affects the actors and can cause them to spring surprises, sometimes pleasant and other times unpleasant, an “anti-flow”, which Turner suggests, occurs when an actor is aware that he is aware for “Self-consciousness makes him stumble”.²⁰⁰ “Good or bad”, as Brecht might have said, the actors of *Kingdom of the Mask*, did convey to its audiences, the thematic concerns of the

¹⁹⁷ Pickering, K, *Studying Modern Drama* (2nd Ed), Ibid, p.8

¹⁹⁸ Brook, P, Ibid, p.119

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.20

²⁰⁰ Turner, V, p.56

adaptation, corruption and enlightenment, which begins with questioning one's own integrity, and most of the post-performance speeches were reflections on these themes.

Audience Response

The performance was well received by the live audiences on the two occasions it was staged. The first performance took place on February 20, 2007 and the second performance took place two days later, February 22. On those two occasions, the auditorium remained almost full after the performances with both actors and audience paying full attention to comments from distinguished members of the audiences.



Fig.11: Actors become audience as they listen to comments by distinguished members of the audience.

From my perspective, that the audiences stayed on was a sign of their engagement with the performance. The actors then became part of the audience themselves as they sat down on the stage listening to the comments and cheering fellow actors who received special approbations from the speakers. The audience comprised people from all walks of life and different social classes and were made up of both the “knowing and unknowing audiences”.²⁰¹ The knowing audience, according to Hutcheon, is aware of the adapted text and therefore “of the adaptation’s enriching, palimpsestic doubleness” while the unknowing audience simply approach the adaptation as any other work.²⁰²

²⁰¹ Hutcheon, L, Ibid, p.120

²⁰² Loc. Cit

Most members of the cast I interviewed had not read the novel and I had a feeling it could be the same with most people in the audience.

The College auditorium, which has seating capacity for about five hundred people, was filled to the brim and people were watching through the windows. Students made up of sixty-five percent of the total number of the audiences at both productions. This was expected because about ninety three percent of the cast and production team were lecturers and students from tertiary institutions in Owerri. Some students watched both productions and probably accounted for the early audience involvement with stage actions and actors' lines on the second day. I later understood that some students of Theatre Studies in Imo State University were given an assignment to see the play and comment on it. During the course of both performances the audiences responded to actors in different but appreciative ways. They chuckled and laughed out loud, cheered and clapped hands and also exclaimed in shock, depending on how they received the acting or performance.

The spontaneous reactions were either theme-oriented or entertainment-based. An example of thematic response came when in Act 3 Scene 2 (*Video Clip 3*), Odili rejected Nanga's bribe and dressed him down with "*Well, Chief Nanga, or whatever you call yourself* (so far, actor's words)' you can take your filthy money and clear out of here. Bush man!" At these words, the audience went "Heey!" – an expression of shock at experiencing what is considered *aru*, a taboo (something rude and disrespectful to a highly placed personality) that bears a catastrophic consequence like a mere mortal unmasking the masquerade. This feeling is couched in Mr Samalu's reproach to Odili when Nanga is gone: "My son, why don't you fall where your pieces can be gathered?" However, having then realised that speaking to a political elite with courage was possible, the audience appreciated Odili's guts by clapping their hands. With that response, I felt a lesson on courage had been taught through the performance.

The significance of that response lies in the fact that this research is investigating how the stage could be used to transmit our stories to the public. The aim of stories in the Igbo cultural context is to teach one lesson of life or another. The story this performance tells is about our past, about corruption in post-independence Africa with names like Odili and Odo sounding so Igbo. It would not count as a success if the

audience is not aroused against corruption and hypocrisy. In responding the way they did, the audience actually contributed to the force of that performance²⁰³, confirming Richard Schechner's definition of 'performance' as what both actors and audience do.²⁰⁴ It is this audience inclusion in defining performance that has over the centuries made theatre a veritable apparatus in the hands of revolutionaries who seek social change. Augusto Boal has observed that even Aristotelians, Machiavellians and Shakespeareans value the theatre in their bids to create obedient citizens for the State – “to immobilize society by perpetuating the existing system”²⁰⁵ – which is aristocratic or feudalistic. Whether for the people or for the ruling class, one thing is very clear, theatre is a powerful means of conveying a message because the people are able to see, feel and react together. Unlike the novel to which we react individually and make our own interpretations, Fry says

The audience member has a very different responding effect during his two to three hours traffic of the stage. He is involved in a communal experience – an event – generally in darkness. The audience tends to react simultaneously, laughing or jumping or applauding together. (People reading alone tend not to laugh hysterically.)....Whilst the audience members may be allowed to draw their own conclusions about a character's behaviour, the choices are less arbitrary that they would be on the page, as they are watching real people (real actors) doing actual things.²⁰⁶

For the reason that theatre experience is shared and reactions are simultaneous, individuals are able to learn what the community appreciates and detests. This is why Enekwe argues that drama is beyond entertainment because it is a means of socialization and it is through socialization that culture is learned.²⁰⁷ By applauding Odili's courage together, individual members of the audience not only draw strength from the actor but also from each other because the Igbo believe in the saying *igwe bu ike* – there is strength in number. Schechner strongly argues in favour of the efficacy of drama and theatre when he writes that “what happens on stage has emotional and ideological consequences for both performers and spectators.”²⁰⁸

²⁰³ Kerr, D, *Ibid*, p.2

²⁰⁴ Schechner, R, *Performance Theory*, *Ibid*, pp.70-71.

²⁰⁵ Boal, A, *Theater of the Oppressed* (New Ed), Lon, Pluto Press, 2000, p.55.

²⁰⁶ Fry, *Ibid*, p.xiv

²⁰⁷ Enekwe E, “Beyond Entertainment: A Reflection on Drama and Theatre,” *Ibid*, p.13

²⁰⁸ Schechner, R, *Performance Studies: An Introduction* (2nd Ed), NY, Routledge, 2006, p.124

In addition to the ideological response, the audience also responded to the entertaining aspects of the performance. They cheered and clapped for the dancers – both the masquerade and other dancers that introduced Nanga’s political campaign. They roared and shouted in response to the imbecile voter (*Video Clip 7*). The second day audience was almost into everything, echoing back interesting sounds from the actors like Nanga’s end words when he comes to bribe Odili. The director considered the second day audience as ‘undisciplined’ for their streaming reactions. After thinking over it, I came to the conclusion that they were, after all, not undisciplined; they were only faithful to the Igbo and African tradition of participatory performance to which Kerr urges post-independence African theatre practitioners to return.²⁰⁹ In traditional Igbo theatre, dancing, for instance, is not left to the dance group alone. Individuals can always join for a few dance steps in appreciation of what the dancers are doing and retire back to the audience. At other times, a dancer can go and dance among the spectators and rejoin the group in their own performing space. The masquerade as a form of theatre always stirs its audience. It is good to remind us that Igbo communal life and the philosophy of *umunna* resulted from Igbo individualism and their republican approach to life. The implication of this individualism is that the typical Igbo feels abused if he is not allowed to air his opinion. A typical Igbo audience, therefore, is not expected to withhold their emotions as is witnessed in many European theatres. The restive crowd that Max addressed at the launching of CPC reflects a typical Igbo audience. In my script, the crowd appears disciplined and the Ex-Police Officer is the one constantly interrupting Max; but on stage, almost every member of that crowd was involved in the interruption. (*Video, Clip 4*).

Distinguished members of the audience were given opportunities to comment following the performance. Their responses also touched on the two aspects of the adaptation – the educative (thematic) and entertainment. On the first day, Barrister Soronnadi Njoku, an Imo State commissioner, remarked that the lesson of the play is that, “For all of us, when the chips are down, we are wearing one mask or the other.” He then spent another ten minutes discussing what he considered the central theme of the play, corruption, in order to show how this mask is worn by everybody. Corruption, he said, is very encompassing as it includes bribery, stealing, obtaining by trick, favouritism and

²⁰⁹ Kerr, D, Ibid, P.2

misuse of public fund or assets. His argument is that by the time all the subsets of corruption are fully explored, then we would discover that we are all putting on one mask or the other. According to the Provost of the College, Prof. CN Uwazurike, who spoke on the second day, mask wearing occurs in our lives more often than we think. “Today, I have been told that I am wearing a mask. Whatever behaviour I put up that is contradictory to my real behaviour is a matter of pretences.” About the play he added: “It’s a social satire; it is a political satire. In fact, it is a redress of societal ethos. That’s the way I understand it, I don’t know about you.”

Like Soronnadi and Uwazurike, other speakers commended the performance, the cast and individual actors. In the words of Uwazurike “The cast was exceptionally wonderful...I have been entertained.” Commending the actor who undertook the role of a disabled (imbecile) voter, the Arts Council Director from Bayelsa State re-echoed the saying that “There are no small roles in theatre but there are small actors.” (*Video, Clip 10*). Prof Jasper Onuekwusi felt that the adaptation would make Chinua Achebe proud and that it has increased the volume of the reception of the novel because “drama gives legs to stories.” All the comments were generally positive but some of the voices that spoke testified to the dearth of drama and theatre (as we know it in the post colonial era) in the land. Soronnadi said it was 1983 when he last watched a play of this sort. The Students’ Dean of the host institution spoke of ‘how it used to be twenty to thirty years ago’ and pleaded with the Provost of the college, Uwazurike, to make such an evening possible at least once a month to ‘unwind’ and let go the stress of labour. Earlier, before the Dean’s plea, this is how Uwazurike began his speech: “I want to associate myself with Alvan family for the great support given this night. This is how it used to be in those days.”

It is ‘those days’ of storytelling, of theatre and drama that I hope that this research cproject can help to revive because of my conviction that the present decadence in our society owes much to lack of storytelling, particularly the dramatic genre and theatre. As Wole Soyinka observes, drama can give way to other art forms like song and poetry in the spread of social sentiments when it is closely watched by an oppressive regime.

However, to effectively counter an alienating environment, then there is a need to invigorate drama.²¹⁰

The response to the performance continued with the Nigerian Televisions Authority (NTA) in Imo State (Channel 12). They used the first day performance extensively as a news item from the evening of Wednesday, the 21st of February to the following morning, commenting that the play criticised the corrupt and violent politics prevalent in the country. A good number of people that made up the audience on the second day performance knew about the production through the television news. Although I could not ascertain the number of people affected by the performance and television news, those interviewed later in the year showed how the adaptation made a positive impact on the audience. While some revealed that the performance led them to read the novel, *A Man of the People*, others spoke of how it influenced their approach to the 2007 general elections in the country. According to one of the young men interviewed, Mascot Nwakamma, the play gave him insight into Nigerian politics and helped him to avoid thuggery and money politics. However, some of those interviewed also felt that there were improvements to be made in script, acting, costumes and props. Combining the criticisms and new inspirations that came my way after the staging, I had to take another look at the script to produce what I have referred to as the Final Draft as seen in Chapter Two above. Before reflecting on the changes I brought into the Final Draft, I am going to discuss the creative process of the performance script in the next chapter.

²¹⁰ Soyinka, W, “*Theatre in African Traditional Culture: Survival Patterns*”, in Jeyifo B, Modern African Drama, Lon, W.W. Norton and Company, Lon, 2002, p.421

Chapter Four

THE PERFORMANCE SCRIPT: THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Adaptation is about choice making. The choices to be made involve both artistic and technical decisions and are determined, as Hutcheon has observed, by questions of “What? Who? Why? How? Where? When?”²¹¹ This chapter will shed more light on the reasons for the choices I made in writing the Performance Script. I will answer the questions of *what* I chose to adapt – what theme was of great interest to me and *why* I made the decision before proceeding to show *how* I went about it, choosing the right incidents and creating other scenes to project the theme I chose to adapt.

Invariably, any script writer, whether in adaptation or original script, goes through a process of distillation to choose the best incidents relevant to their purpose in composing their story. However, this process of choice making seems to be more arduous in adaptation because the script writer does not own the original story. The text that forms the palimpsest for the adaptor could be a conglomeration of countless interesting incidents clamouring for the stage. Adaptors find themselves oscillating between their own choices and that of either the producers or directors who would have read the same stories. Every reader brings into the text their own subjectivity, ‘imposing their own abrasions on the fine surface.’²¹²

What Choices and Why?

My purpose in adapting this particular novel is of two facets: to show that in the battle against political corruption, public awareness and enlightenment is a *sine qua non*; and, with some cultural and aesthetic impulse, to juxtapose the traditional elements of Igbo theatre – music, dance, masquerade and games - with post-colonial drama in order to show that literary theatre can gleefully combine with traditional theatre to create meaning. My reasons for these decisions are informed by the fact that the political situation in Nigeria at the time of adaptation (as explained in Chapter One) reflected issues raised in the novel such as money politics, violence, ‘sit tight’ politics, the recycling of old politicians and above all, a call for the intellectuals to get involved in politics. It is good to observe that this adaptation was scheduled to take place in Igbo

²¹¹ Hutcheon, L, *A Theory of Adaptation*, NY, Routledge, 2006, p.1

²¹² Barthes, R, ‘The Pleasure of the Text’ in Easthope A & McGowan K, *A Critical and Cultural Theory Reader*, Buckingham, Open Uni Press, 1992, p.97

land shortly before the 2007 Nigerian general elections. Nothing could have been more appropriate than using the theatre to educate the people on their political responsibilities towards society.

On the question of theatre, there was no pronounced theatrical activity in Igbo land to help address any issues at all – political, cultural, religious, moral or social. My readings towards understanding Igbo theatre at that time rather brought me to realise that an argument has been going among Igbo scholars for a long time as to what constitutes Igbo drama and theatre. The argument is whether the masquerade theatre is complete drama or whether it is drama yet to be developed from the masquerade theatre. I discuss this in more detail later on in this chapter, but meanwhile, I felt that the Igbo scholars have not done our society any good by hanging on to this type of argument while dramatic activities have practically died in Igbo land. So I decided from the start that I was going to move into the “Third Space”²¹³ of hybrid culture, to fuse my script with elements of traditional theatre believing, as Homi Bhabha observes, “that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew.”²¹⁴ All these terminologies are encapsulated within the term, adaptation, which involves both horizontal-spatial and vertical-temporal artistic combinations and cultural permutations. On the horizontal-spatial plane, we can adapt from other societies and cultures while on the vertical-temporal, we can adapt from past generations. When we examine the pre-colonial Igbo ideology relating to the arts, especially, the mbari art system, we can say for certain that our forebears expect us to ‘appropriate, translate, rehistoricize and read anew’ the art forms of the past according to our own contemporary cultural and social realities. In the art of storytelling, Emenyonu observes that the folktales were adapted according to the changing emphasis in society, and that helped the stories to be elastic and progressive.²¹⁵ Adapting traditional elements of Igbo theatre according to the changes in our society is also the way Igbo theatre can maintain its own elasticity and progress. It is my belief that if the elements of traditional theatre are constantly reviewed and reinterpreted, the dead ones could be resurrected with new meanings while the active ones enjoy renewed vigour as they are continually adjusted to contemporary aesthetics. This is based on my positive

²¹³ Bhabha, H K, “Cultural Diversity and Cultural Differences”, in Ashcroft B et al (eds), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, London, Routledge, 1995, p.208

²¹⁴ Loc. Cit

²¹⁵ Emenyonu, E, *Ibid*, p.16

assumption that theatre is still a place of meaning-making and of symbolization. Reactivating theatrical practice is an important task in this research endeavour and is one of my background motivations. The practice has to be a combination of intellectual drama and traditional theatre. None must leave the other behind in order to achieve a successful cultural renaissance through theatre.

In making this combination, I had to keep in mind a point Emeka Nwabueze²¹⁶ raised during my interview with him in 2006 as one of the problems of theatrical practice in Igbo land. He said:

Igbo man has not really caused theatre to transcend from concert to intellectual activity. They want something direct and immediate; something that has too much spectacle; something that does not task your imagination to grasp meaning. Something that can go down to them as flat entertainment.²¹⁷

Nwabueze's statement calls to mind Basden's view that when the Igbo seeks entertainment, he "enters into it whole-heartedly; he lets nothing interfere with the pleasure of the moment"²¹⁸, meaning that the Igbo, naturally, do not want to mix intellectual and recreational activities. I do not really agree with these arguments considering the fact that Igbo traditional forms of entertainments had lessons to teach. Moreover, the positive experiences I had and the observations I made of our society while working with Alvana, which I am going to narrate later in this chapter also bear witness that the Igbo appreciate informative entertainments. However, the arguments were helpful to me because they strengthened my resolve to fuse traditional performances with fictional narratives because the former possess greater potentials to heighten entertainment and involve audiences. Nwabueze's other point about what is adversely affecting theatre in Igbo land is very understandable: "political dishonesty"²¹⁹ – political appointments that put square pegs in round holes; and the area of arts seems to have suffered more than other areas. As Nwabueze puts it: "In Igbo land, many of the people who are in charge of arts and culture are not educated and therefore do not

²¹⁶ Prof Emeka Nwabueze is Head of Department, Theatre Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and the adaptor of Achebe's novel, "Arrow of God".

²¹⁷ Nwabueze, E, "Interview" (with Chikwendu Anyanwu), Nsukka, May 2006

²¹⁸ Basden, G. T. , Ibid. p.342

²¹⁹ Nwabueze, E, Ibid.

support theatre.”²²⁰ He explains that their attitude is like that of Plato who saw theatre practitioners as “destroyers, people who tell lies, trying to find fault, (who) should be banished from the republic.”²²¹

Toni Duruaku²²², appointed the Director of Imo State Council for Arts and Culture in 2001 is, however, one that can be described as a round peg in a round hole because he is a respected artist around the country and he wanted to make positive changes; but he resigned after being frustrated by this ‘political dishonesty’ and he went back to lecturing in the university. Duruaku’s story during my interview with him exposes the corruption among workers and artists in the Council, who he said “need reorientation because they are not mentally prepared for development.”²²³ Inside the Council premises at Owerri, as I saw it, the daily picture is that of workers and artists sitting under a mango tree chatting and laughing during working hours. It does not matter the time of work period you arrive there. According to Duruaku, the artists receive salaries for doing nothing and they seek to make money from services they should render freely.²²⁴ The amphitheatre architecture has been abandoned for more than two decades and a new visitor entering the gates and looking straight to the direction of the abandoned project would think it is a forest reserve inside the Arts Council. It does not seem to concern the government in any way at all. Since they are not doing anything to promote theatre activities, entrepreneurs (most of whom are the capitalist politicians) only buy up lands in the major cities of Igbo land to build hotels. This attitude suggests that Nwabueze is right when he added to his earlier statement that the Igbo like flat entertainment that, “Igbo man’s method of relaxation is drinking in a hotel and sleeping with a woman.”²²⁵ I found this disturbing, but the realities on the ground would disarm any opposition to that statement, which is re-echoed by Duruaku in another form. I would like to quote him at length:

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ Ibid

²²² Duruaku is a respected artist and writer and has written a number of plays including *A Question of Choice* (1987), *Silhouettes* (1993), *Cash Price* (1997), *Five Moral Plays* (for Children) (1998) and *A Matter of Identity* (2003), which won the Nigerian Writers’ Association prize in 2004. After resigning as the Director of the Arts Council, Duruaku went back lecturing in the Drama and Theatre department of Imo State University (IMSU) and in the English department of Alvan Ikoku College of Education (AICE), both in Owerri town. He was also the Chairman of the Imo State Chapter of Nigerian Writers Association. Despite his exit from the Arts Council, he was retained as the Chairman of the Directors of Arts Council of the Oil Producing States of Nigeria.

²²³ Duruaku, ABC, Interview, (with Chikwendu Anyanwu), Owerri, May 2006

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Nwabueze, E, Ibid.

If you are talking about stage theatre, it is not popular here. It is not popular here because our people don't relax. The Igbo man finds it difficult to relax. He will work and work and work and there is no time to take his family out to go and watch anything. And in response to this lack, entrepreneurs have failed to build theatres or create relaxation places. Example, in the whole of Orlu metropolis, there is no theatre but there are hotels. The whole of Owerri, only one building is a designated theatre – Rosy Arts Theatre, which is now used as wedding reception area and that is because it wasn't built to be a theatre in that sense, never mind the name.²²⁶

I had these interviews with Professor Nwabueze and with Duruaku (who eventually became the director of this adaptation) in May 2006 before I began to write my script. Their views reinforced my resolve to focus on the political theme, about corruption, about ordinary people in need of enlightenment and reorientation, as Duruaku pointed out. There is no doubt that a corrupt government would produce corrupt masses because as Ania Loomba observes, Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels write that “the ideologies that most circulate or gain currency in any society reflect and reproduce the interests of the dominant social class”.²²⁷ According to Marx and Engels “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas”.²²⁸ In other words, a government that sits down calculating how much they can make from the public fund cannot be bothered about what the civil servants are doing. Rather, their attitude is reflected in the civil servants.

That was the scenario before me while I was writing the script and there was no going back on the decisions I already made, about focusing on political corruption and enlightenment and about incorporating cultural performances or aspects of traditional theatre as a strategy to engage the audience with the production. A dramatic performance that is aimed at political capitalists means that the dramatist must make sure he carries the people along with him in order to give his own ideologies, which counter that of the ruling class, a chance to be received by the people.

²²⁶ Duruaku, Ibid.

²²⁷ Loomba, A, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism: The New Critical Idiom* (2nd ed), London, Routledge, 2005, p.27

²²⁸ Ibid, p.30

My position is that without the chants, the dances and the games, drama among the Igbo could be alienating and a dramaturgist wishing to involve the people in the struggle for a just society may not be successful without them. Productions without them could prove counter-productive. My argument here is based on my own experiences of social dramas in Igbo land. For example, in my community, up to the late 1970s, if a thief is caught, they are stripped naked and whatever they stole was hung around their neck. They are paraded along the village roads with chants and dance steps to make the message clear to intending thieves. During this spectacle of shame, the thief is kept in front of the crowd and is scourged by young men who carried them shoulder high from time to time for all to see. Growing up in my community, we formulated songs in response to disappointments and crises, from family and individual relationships to national issues. Today, it is possible to narrate the story of Nigeria-Biafra war through the songs the Igbo formulated in that period. The war was a social drama on a grand scale and the songs and chants (what I may call the people's propaganda) played great roles in the people's resistance against Nigeria's aggression. As Antonio Gramsci has observed, "The proletariat or oppressed subject possesses a dual consciousness – that which is beholden to the rulers, and complicit with their will, and that which is capable of developing into resistance".²²⁹ A dramatist with a political theme, aiming to dislodge the ideologies of the ruling class has to be aware of this mental state, of the dual consciousness of his audience, and find the best possible means of enhancing their will to resistance. This is the wisdom in Brecht's application of these elements in the diffusion of political and moral lessons. It is because of the importance I attached to getting the people engaged that I had to create more scenes that involve the ordinary people in order to hold up a mirror to them through the adaptation, irrespective of the fact that some of those scenes slowed down the pace of the drama. In any case, that is what the people are capable of doing – slowing things down. I did that to express my wish that my adaptation can help the people to slow down the rapidity with which the politicians are exploiting our society. It is a wish that is built on my past experiences of the effect of stage drama in Owerri before I left for London on study leave.

Who? My Background Experience of Drama and Society

²²⁹Ibid, p.29

Though my interviews with Nwabueze and Duruaku made me to begin to entertain doubts regarding the success of this adaptation, wondering if I was going to get enough audience to watch the production, the experiences before I left Owerri and my social status as a Catholic priest supplied the confidence to forge ahead. Before I left Owerri for London on study leave, I was involved in a number of stage productions that included *Martyred for True Love* (1994), *Laments Hopes and Carols* (1994/95), *Nkemakolam* (1996 the first Odenigbo drama) and these productions attracted thousands of people and were staged in the open field apart from *Laments, Hopes and Carols* which was performed in a hall. In fact, the public demanded a live repeat of *Laments, Hopes and Carols* after a television replay and some people were unhappy that they couldn't get into the hall on the first day because it was filled up. I analysed my experiences against Duruaku's, which was that they had tried different times (including matinee) and days to see if people would respond but they were not yielding the desired result. It was then that I began to understand the importance of my position as a Catholic priest in the society, and this was later to be reiterated by Chinedu Opara, the actor who played Odili, when he said to me: "Father, do you know why this play is having headway? Because you are a priest, that's why people are even listening to you. If it's any of us, who will listen? They will think you have come to extort money from them."²³⁰ The productions I mentioned above also succeeded because they had the support of the Archbishop of Owerri, AJV Obinna, and were funded by the Archdiocese, meaning that people did not have to pay to watch them. The important thing however was that I had made a mark in Owerri with those performances with my group, Alvana Catholic Young Voices, and I trusted that those marks and my position as a Catholic priest were going to see me through, especially for the fact that the stories I heard never pointed to any serious endeavour in the area of stage drama since I left.

Another motivational factor came through my literary studies, which opened my eyes to the efforts African literary scholars have been making to preserve, regenerate and re-present our cultural values in the postcolonial era. I felt obliged to make my own contribution by carrying out this research project. To be a Catholic priest and a literary student meant that there was no hiding from the task of educating the public. My strong belief has been that the dramatic medium will be more effective in this struggle to re-

²³⁰ Opara C, (An informal comment over the production of *Kingdom of the Mask*), Feb 2007

establish the true values of society judging from my past experiences in using drama as a didactic tool and indeed as a means to empower the people. In as much as preaching from the pulpit makes its own impact on the listening congregation, I argue that the dramatic medium can impact more on society, which is why the missionaries used it to spread Christianity in Africa.²³¹ While the Catholic priesthood gives me credibility and authority before the people, I feel that art (dramatic practice) brings me closer and makes me more acceptable irrespective of people's religious beliefs.

The arts, I would argue, dissolves the distance between the people and the priest in a society where priests are more inclined to the bourgeoisie life style. It also breaks the religious and denominational barriers, which separate Catholics from non-Christians and non-Catholics respectively. From the pulpit, I speak to Catholics only, but from the stage, I speak to Catholics and non-Catholics, Christians and non-Christians. I argue that the latter has the tendency to be socially more efficacious because it is free from religious prejudices and sectarian insulation. For example, in the early 1990s, Valentine's Day attracted uncontrolled celebrations among the youths in Owerri and the Church sermons advising young people to desist from such celebrations did not seem to yield positive results. However, in February 1994, the Archbishop, A J V Obinna directed that we, Alvana Catholic Young Voices and the Catholic Students of Alvan Ikoku College of Education should recast his play, *Martyred for True Love*, for the public. Seeing the play in which Father Valentine is beheaded for promoting married love as against the 'military celibacy' decreed by Emperor Claudius II (which inadvertently encouraged promiscuity among young people), over two thousand youths in the audience saw that Valentine's Day had been turned upside down. Naturally, people like to be on the side of knowledge, or in the words of Aristotle, "discovery, learning things, gives pleasure not only to the intellectually-minded but to all of us, of whatever mental ability"²³², and I supposed that helped to get many youths to keep their distance from celebrating the wrong notion of Valentine's Day. The impact is such that from then to this day, Valentine's Day in Owerri has continued to attract thousands of young people to the Cathedral premises where after Eucharistic celebration with the Archbishop, whose middle name is John Valentine, they are

²³¹ Cf. Omotoso, K, "Concepts of History and Theatre in Africa", in Banham, M, *A History of Theatre in Africa*, Cambridge, CUP, 2004, pp 1- 3.

²³² Aristotle, *Poetics*, (A New Translation by Kenneth McLeish), London, Nick Hern Books, 1998, p.6

entertained to drama, music and dance by different Universities, Secondary Schools and youth groups in and around Owerri.

Again, there was a reason why on the 6th of September 1996, on the day the people rose against the OBT (Obtaining By Trick) or 419²³³ gang in Owerri, the State television (Imo Broadcasting Corporation – IBC) replayed our 1994 Christmas Concert titled *Laments, Hopes and Carols*. It was simply in acknowledgement of the effect of that performance on the lives of the people who hitherto had remained timid in the face of the callous operations of a group that enjoyed government protection. *Laments, Hopes and Carols* was a command performance which the Archbishop of Owerri demanded of my group, to lament over the corrupt and insensitive government and rebuke the OBT gang. He was encouraged by the success of the Valentine and our other performances through the year to command us to this Christmas performance. We used long commentaries interspersed with dramatic actions and evocative songs as in a *lehrstück* play²³⁴ to display the haplessness and hopelessness of ordinary people, decry the corruption in government and prophesy the fall of OBT. It was the voice of teenagers and the language was natural and direct. The impact was even stronger because it was performed in the presence of government officials, including the wife of Imo State governor and State Commissioner for Police. The public demanded a live repeat of the performance in January 1995 irrespective of the television replays. For many people, it was an unprecedented tenacity on the part of the teenagers and they wanted to relive those moments of courage as many times as possible. We obliged and repeated the performance. Nineteen months later, prompted by the same television (by showing the head of a child murdered for ritual practice), the people decided that enough was enough, especially, when it became public knowledge that the arrested culprit had been killed in prison to conceal information. On the 6th and 7th of September 1996, the

²³³ The term was derived from Decree 419 issued by the Military Regime against the act of Obtaining By Trick (OBT). The Decree was meant to convince Nigerians and satisfy the international community that the government was against the trend. 419 or OBT activities included kidnapping, ritual murder, domestic and international swindling, armed robbery and assassination of land owners in order to acquire their lands freely. They enjoyed government protection to the extent that they had policemen assigned to them and the common people judged it suicidal for anyone to criticize them publicly.

²³⁴ Willet, J (Ed & Trans) *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, London, Methuen, 1964, p.33

The dramatic form and the political content correspond to John Willet's description of Brechtian *lehrstück* form which he says "began as a kind of didactic cantata, with solos, choruses and scraps of acting" with the notion that "moral and political lessons could best be taught by participation in actual an actual performance."

people burnt down all properties belonging to all identifiable 419 practitioners and their cohorts and chased them out of town.

By replaying the Christmas Concert on the day I describe as “the day of the people”²³⁵, in my poem, “Smoke in a White City”, the IBC was *ipso facto* acknowledging the influence of our performance over its practice. What makes the influence of the drama more apparent is the fact that this same media house had constantly indulged in broadcasting OBT ceremonies, collecting large sums of money from them and keeping the public in the dark regarding accusations of kidnapping, armed robbery and ritual murder. By moving the media to reveal the truth, *Laments, Hopes and Carols* proved to be the tonic which the people needed to combat the evil that had overwhelmed everyone and ravaged the land. With these and other personal experiences of drama impacting on the lives of the people, I felt that drama is a practice worth sustaining in the fight against decadence of all types and decadence is a social condition many people have identified with the dearth of storytelling. As Maggie Butt points out, we need stories to impose order on chaos,²³⁶ and we cannot fault drama as a veritable medium to tell the stories because as Martin Esslin says “Drama has become one of the principal vehicles of information, one of the prevailing methods of ‘thinking’ about life and its situations”.²³⁷ These positive experiences I had in the past really encouraged me to go ahead and adapt the novel.

In adapting *A Man of the People*, the situations which I wanted the people to think about were the political situation and artistic (theatre) condition in Igbo land. My observation was that after the attack on the men of OBT, they withdrew from flaunting their exploits publicly and regrouped to capture the government in Igbo land if not in Nigeria as a whole. They became Godfathers to most politicians who were compelled to divert public funds into their private accounts. There was no follow up to *Laments Hopes and Carols*, to put pressure and encourage the people against the new OBT which was now wearing full masquerade costume called government. Before, they had

²³⁵ Anyanwu, CPK, “Smoke in a White City”(Poem) in *I Dance Ala-Igbo*, London, Veritas Lumen, 2000, p.

²³⁶ Butt, M, *Story: The Heart of the Matter*, London, Greenwich Exchange, 2007, p.xv

²³⁷ Esslin, M, *The Field of Drama: How the Signs of Drama Create Meaning on Stage and Screen*, London, Methuen, 1987, p.13

government protection but now, the men in government were under their control, indeed, under their protection.

In October 1996, a few weeks after the two-day revolution against OBT, I came to the UK and since then until the production of this adaptation in February 2007, no one had spoken of any remarkable performance that has publicly informed the people about politics in Igbo land, especially in Owerri. It seemed to me that Igbo intellectuals towards the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries had become mirror-images of post-independence intellectuals who chose silence. However, this does not mean that there were no voices being raised among the intellectuals but my argument is that these voices would make greater impact speaking through theatre. The choice then to adapt *A Man of the People* was not just a choice towards political enlightenment but also a choice to investigate the Igbo theatre and make my own statement, knowing that theatre is the means by which the political situation can be effectively addressed.

In traditional Igbo society, politics and theatre were related in that the masquerade, which was at the heart of Igbo traditional theatre, also played an important role in maintaining justice and social harmony. In the language of modern politics, the masquerade system can be referred to as the judiciary and the law enforcement agent in Igbo traditional government. Explaining why he chose the name *Masquerade* (later named *New Masquerade*) for his popular television comedy of the 1970s and 80s, James Iroha²³⁸ told me in an interview that

“In the African context of the word, masquerade has unchallengeable authority, because I deemed through this programme, to touch on the loose knots of society; it doesn’t matter who is involved. It was targeted for those who can make changes in society – the managers, the lecturers, the government and all that...”²³⁹

However, the Igbo masquerade could not retain its political and spiritual powers in the face of Christian religion and colonial government but became pure entertainment. I am

²³⁸ Known by most Nigerians as ‘Giringori’ (his character in the comic series) was the Director of Television Department of the Broadcasting Corporation of Abia State (BCA) when this interview was held in 2001.

²³⁹ James Iroha, “Audio Interview” with Chikwendu Anyanwu, Umuahia, 04 January 2001

of the opinion that post-colonial theatre can be used to perform the political duties of the pre-colonial masquerade. This is why I think Iroha evoked the traditional status of the masquerade in the naming of his comic series, to place society in the dock. The difference in using drama and theatre as ‘the new masquerade’ will be, that while pre-colonial masquerade performed the judicial duties at different times from its theatrical and ritual performances, the post-colonial theatre will perform both at the same time, using entertainment to prosecute, sometimes, judging the situation itself and other times leaving judgment to the audience. In spite of everything, drama and theatre are masks in themselves because they work through character impersonation or mimesis,²⁴⁰ as Aristotle would say, and, as I pointed out in the script, “you need a mask to get through strange masquerades” (Act 2 Scene 3). Our OBT politicians (like Nanga in the novel) are strange masquerades and we need drama as our mask to penetrate their abode like Odili and speak to them in the language that can move them. It is through drama and theatre that we can move the communal will of the people and as in a chain reaction, the communal will in turn moves the politicians.

This is the background and thought process that led me to suggest that the people’s use of their collective and undivided will (Act 4 Scene 5) is the surest way forward in the war against political corruption. It appears like Marxism, socialism or even fascism but it is not. Igbo collective or communal will is not anti-capitalistic; it does not deter individuals from working hard and accumulating wealth but it checks excessiveness, which is amassing wealth through dishonest and corrupt means. Virtue for the Igbo like Aristotle, lies in the mean, not in excess or in deficiency.²⁴¹ The Igbo common will is also known to frown on laziness which pauperizes the human person. However, when an individual’s behaviour becomes excessive and corrupt, as in the case of Josiah, the common will of the people is employed as agent of control and punishment. The common will is all the more needed to control corruption when it is masking as government because at that level, corruption is even more difficult to deal with. As Emmanuel Kant observes, “Before so difficult a problem can be solved, all men together (i.e. the collective unity of the combined will) must desire to attain this goal;

²⁴⁰ Aristotle, *Poetics*, Ibid, p.3

²⁴¹ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Translated with an Introduction by David Ross; revised by J. L. Ackrill and J. O. Urmson), Oxford, OUP, 1925, p.39

only then can civil society exist as a single whole”.²⁴² In my estimation, ‘the collective unity of the combined will’ of the people can only desire to attain the goal of a civil society through proper education and that is why I gave attention to the theme of enlightenment in my adaptation.

How? Selection of Incidents and Creation of New Scenes

Having decided to work on the political theme, I had to read through the novel again to select incidents that would work together and tell the story of political corruption which forms the basis for political enlightenment. Corruption has got many faces and I thought that my adaptation is not the occasion to unveil all of them because that would distract and confuse my audience. Otherwise, incidents like Odili’s affair with Jean the American woman would have been included. There were also a number of other incidents that could have fitted into my selection, indeed, incidents that many adaptors would have been glad to include, that I decided to side track or adapt in other ways. Such incidents include, showing Odili in a state of disillusionment in order for the audience to appreciate his transformation into an active politician; Nanga’s Visit to Anata Grammar School which explains how Odili, Nanga and Edna met and exposes Odili’s hypocrisy in relation to Nanga; Odili’s discussion with Andrew that exposes Nanga’s relationship with Edna and Odili’s interest in her; the coffee drama at Chief Koko’s house, which exposes the double standard of government officials; Nanga’s telephone calls to manipulate contracts and offering of money to journalist to control his publications; the Josiah episode which is considered the central metaphor for the novel; Odili’s first visit to Edna’s house on his return to Bori where Edna’s father, Mr Odo metaphorically represents the people’s attitude towards politicians; Odili’s dismissal from Anata Grammar School on account of his political involvement, challenging a son of Anata; and the fight between Odili’s thugs and Nanga’s thugs. Some of these incidents were mentioned or alluded to in other scenes, while some of them were not mentioned at all. Some, like Odili’s encounter with Mr Odo and the bicycle accident, were included in my earlier drafts but were distilled out in later drafts. I needed to avoid too many locations and add my own voice to the text. During the process of elimination, the question I always asked was: ‘can I do without this?’ If the answer was yes, then, I binned it. It was through this process of elimination, under the

²⁴² Reiss H S, Kant: *Political Writings*, Cambridge, CUP, 1970, p.117

guidance of James Charlton, my script supervisor, that the choice of materials that were used for the Performance Script was made. Then I made a list of the incidents that I thought I needed from the novel.

- Odili's Introduction of Elsie to Nanga
- Book Exhibition (Flashback)
- Nanga's affair with Elsie
- Odili joins Max's political party, CPC.
- Odili plans with Mrs Nanga to dissuade Elsie from marrying Nanga
- The Masquerade dance on Christmas Day
- Odili speaks to Elsie on Christmas day.
- Odili explains his party to his thugs
- Nanga comes to bribe Odili
- CPC campaign at Odili's compound
- Odili is confronted by Edna
- Political harassments on Mr Samalu for allowing CPC campaign in his compound and his reconciliation with his son Odili.
- Nanga's political campaign and the battering of Odili
- The report of Max's death
- Reconciliation with Edna

The scenes I created, mainly to get ordinary more involved are:

- Hawkers' Scenes (suggested by the commentaries on government propaganda on Our Homemade Stuff and allusion to the poisoned coffee drama at Chief Koko's house pp. 33 -35).
- Villagers' Scenes
 - i. Act 3 Scene 6 – Two Village Men (suggested by the conflicting support of Urua people to Odili at the CPC rally [p. 125] and the later announcement by the town crier that Urua will only vote for Chief Nanga p.134).
 - ii. Act 4 Scene 2 – Four Youths in a Game (developed from Odili's post-election reflections. p.144).
 - iii. Act 4 Scene 4 – Villagers react to Military Coup (based upon Odili's report on the coup and the people's response to it pp. 147 and 148).

- Election Day (An obvious event which Odili and Nanga were working towards. In the novel, the narrator, Odili, could not say anything about this event because he was hospitalized).
- Odili exhorts the People (based on Odili's conviction that the people can only decide their governance if they can act with one mind as in the case of Josiah and people of Anata).

According to Aristotle, organising the events in a logical sequence to create believable *muthos* or plot is the most important aspect of drama, for *muthos* is the soul of drama.²⁴³ The events have to be organised so that the story has a beginning, a middle and an end. This aspect was not as tedious as selecting the events and creating new scenes that fitted into the existing materials; and that was because I adopted a linear approach, following the novel sequence. I remembered Nwabueze saying that he wanted to use the cyclical structure in his adaptation of Achebe's *Arrow of God*, but changed his mind on the ground that he thought it was unnecessarily academic, considering his audience. Again he added "And if your purpose is to interpret Achebe, to sell Achebe's ideas to your audience in a visual manner, then unnecessary philosophising and academic jingoism will not help."²⁴⁴ To help me simplify things, James Charlton, directed me to create scenes based on the choices I made, then write a summary of each scene, to know what I really wanted to happen there. After that process, what was important to me then was what I would first show the audience, to capture their attention as Nwabueze advised. I thought of a verse to use as prologue, something that would catch the attention of the audience and at the same time portray the theme of corruption and enlightenment. I wrote a number of them that were discarded. Indeed, both my programme director, Maggie Butt and my stage director, Duruaku, did not think a verse prologue was a good idea and was not likely to perform the function I intended it to perform. Duruaku came up with the idea of a choreographed prologue and advised that some part of Odili's final speech be used during staging to voice over the choreographic movement, using face masks. I created Odili's last speech as the final admonition to the people to act with a collective will in the fight against corruption and it was the second part of it that was to be used as part of the prologue:

²⁴³ Aristotle, Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Nwabueze, E, Interview, Ibid.

ODILI:Why do you jump like grasshoppers from one forest to another adoring trees that rise above the forests and obstruct sunlight to the rest? There is only one salvation tree for you. To this tree only should you sing to follow. Not Nanga, Koko or the Military Dictator. It is not to Odili that you should sing to follow: Follow your collective and undivided will. ONE MIND!

I found this approach more lively and interesting and adopted it. This, then, (as in *Video, Clip 1*) is how the play begins, followed by Act 1 Scene 1, a hawker using a bell as in a school, to call the attention of the audience. The hawker sells his wares and at the same time educates the people about government policy on Home Made Stuff. His language, Pidgin, is attractive, humorous and playful and he represents my whole idea of adapting our novels to stage – teaching the people in a playful manner. I used both the prologue (with the words directed to the masses) and the hawker's scene to make my intention known that I want to speak to the people through this adaptation. The ending of the play mirrors the beginning even though the full speech by Odili is rendered before the choreographed movement of maskers closes the play to indicate that the search for knowledge continues.

All in all, the story from the political perspective remains the same as in the novel, irrespective of the fact that not all the incidents were chosen. It is still the story of Odili, whose girl friend was wrenched from him by his former school teacher, Chief Nanga, who became a corrupt politician and a Minister. Odili seeks revenge, contesting Nanga's political position while at the same time courting Nanga's young fiancée, Edna. Nanga and his party succeed in returning to power but Edna leaves Nanga for Odili. In the end, the military stages a coup and overthrows the government punishing the corrupt politicians. Odili blames the people for the catastrophe because they chose to vote in corrupt men and did not allow their collective will to guide their actions.

Looking at the story, especially from the political point of view, the protagonist and the antagonist are in pursuit of one goal and that is the seat in the Parliament, meaning that the most important event in the narrative is the Election, which determines who wins the seat. The struggle over Edna is metaphorical in relation to this ultimate goal which is power. Indeed, Edna represents the trophy for the winner considering that ours is male dominated society where women are 'won'. As Sharon Macdonal, Pat Holden and

Shirley Ardener have observed, “In a world in which gender is a principal articulator of the social order, and in which it is men who wage war, women may take on a particular objectified importance as ‘the protected’, or even as the custodians of the social values that the men are fighting for.”²⁴⁵ So, for the men involved, Edna is not as important as the political power and that is why Nanga pushes her violently to the floor to beat up Odili. The most important thing is the political position determined by the election, but in the novel this most important event is not reported because the narrator-protagonist, Odili, is in the hospital at this time, nursing injuries.

It therefore became an important decision I had to make, to dramatize the election which is where the people’s will is completely thwarted through bribery (buying their votes) and manipulation of ballot papers in broad day light. In 2003 Nigerian elections, the people refused to let the Archbishop of Owerri leave the premises where he voted as the only way to protect the ballot boxes from being snatched away. Performing a drama with special focus on politics, in Owerri or Nigeria as a whole, in the period of political campaigns, when party primary elections had just been held and winners were denied the right to contest by party chieftains, and not featuring the actual election would not have been a good decision at all. It was easier for me to dramatize the Election because I was not using Odili as a narrator as in the novel. This however, is an issue I have had to deal with in the Final Draft because I later decided to use the reminiscence or cyclical structure and narrator style to revise the adaptation after the performance. I felt more confident to do so after watching the stage performance of this adaptation and Oladipo Agboluaje’s “*The Hounding of David Oluwale*”, which is a historical adaptation of a racial abuse by Leeds metropolitan police that led to the death of a young Yoruba man. The changes I made in the Final Draft will be discussed in the in the next chapter.

I kept faith with the novel to return Nanga and his party back to power and subsequently, the military takes over government. The denouement of the adaptation as in the novel is tragic, not favouring both the politicians and the people. Taking into account that this is not the ideal political situation, the decision was to give me that

²⁴⁵ Macdonal, S et al (eds), *Images of Women in Peace and War: Cross-Cultural and Historical Perspectives*, Basingstoke, Macmillan Education, 1987, p.15

opportunity to create more scenes to analyse the situation and give my audience my final admonition. These are Act 4 scenes 4 and 5. In Act 4 Scene 5, on hearing that the army has taken over the government and is going to appoint Odili a minister, the people decide to go and identify with him. “So that when he eats ... We too will eat...” In Scene 5, Odili and his father analyse the situation before the people arrive. Odili is clearly not happy with the army takeover, irrespective of the indication that he will be appointed a minister. My aim here is to underscore that Odili’s transformation from pursuing a personal interest to a societal interest is not tentative but he is convinced. Otherwise, he would show great excitement, expecting a political appointment for which he was hounded by Nanga. This is in keeping with his character which Max described to his fiancée, Eunice: “He does not compromise with thoroughness. We called him ‘Diligent’ in the campus” (Act 1 Scene 4). This is Odili’s character that I was more interested in, knowing also the selfish aspect of him in the novel. I didn’t want to dwell much on his negative attributes because I needed the audience to empathise with him in order to listen to him since it is through him and partly through Max that I want to speak to my audience.

The character of Odili that I really wanted to register in the consciousness of my audience is that which confronts Nanga and rejects his bribe; disagrees with Max on collecting money from the opposition; that, which courageously tells the people that Nanga is a liar. It is necessary for me to have such a character that simulates bravery for my audience because of my conviction that my society is growing irretrievably timid because of carnivorous politicians. Many critics of *A Man of the People* have pointed out that Odili is not a trustworthy character,²⁴⁶ especially, for shelving his reservations for Nanga and accepting the latter’s invitation to Bori. For my purpose, Odili’s antic in getting closer to Nanga is a necessity: a necessity that enables both the novelist and the scriptwriter to create dramatic conflicts in the stories. Odili needed the closeness for his enlightenment in order to educate the masses with authority instead of using second hand information. I expressed this necessity in Act 2 Scene 3 through the following lines which I inserted in the dialogue between Odili and Edna on Christmas day, at Nanga’s village house.

²⁴⁶ Gikandi, S, Ibid, pp119

(Edna leaves. The masquerade music wells up and Odili joins in the song. Edna returns with a drink and meat. After serving Odili, she leans on a rail looking out).

ODILI: Edna, why don't you sit down?

EDNA: I'm alright here, I want to see what's going on along the road.

ODILI: Is anything going on?

EDNA: Oh, masquerades and people in their Christmas best. How did you pass through the masquerades? They do not allow strangers to cross.

ODILI: Well, you need a mask to get through strange masquerades. I had to put on a mask.

EDNA: *(Turns sharply)*. A mask?

ODILI: *(Brings out a mask head from his bag and shows her)*.

Strange situations can force a mask on you.

EDNA: What do you mean?

ODILI: Never mind.

EDNA: Can I try it on?

ODILI: Why not? Try it. Mask on mask; on your beautiful face, yes! *(laughs)*.

EDNA: That's not funny! Let me see.

ODILI: *(Odili puts the mask on his face and makes faces at her; tries to put it on Edna's face. She avoids it and turns back to the rail laughing)*. Anybody can put on a mask but for different reasons.

EDNA: It makes people look ugly.

ODILI: No! Just different.

EDNA: *(giggles sarcastically)* You are very funny, Mr. Samalu.

ODILI: *(sits down and pauses for a while)*. Edna, I have something to tell you.

EDNA: Me?

Compare the above with the novel version.

Why don't you sit, Edna?' I said with as much decisiveness as I could put into it.

I am all right here,' she said. 'I want to see what is going on in the road'

'Is anything going on?' I stood up and went to her window and was tempted to put an arm round her waist but decided that it might be premature.

'Oh, just people passing in their new Christmas dresses.'

'There is something I want to tell you,' I said, returning to my seat.

'Me?' she said, turning round and looking genuinely surprised.

(AMOP, p.97)

In the novel, Edna never mentioned masquerades but she does in the adaptation and that was to help me veer into a metaphorical dialogue between her and Odili, to defend Odili's masking behaviour and save him from being categorized as Nanga. Such insertion is one of the imports of adaptation, which Hutcheon says combines the pleasure of recognition with the piquancy of surprise.²⁴⁷ It is not enough to make a decision to insert such a discussion but also to choose where to insert it so that it seamlessly flows with the whole script. The occasion is Christmas when it is normal for masquerades to perform and Achebe himself describes a masquerade performance in the novel on this occasion before this dialogue between Edna and Odili takes place. Based on that, I assumed that if Edna is looking outside and is seeing people, she could also be seeing the masquerades performing. Masquerades create more spectacle than ordinary people working about in their Christmas attires and would sound more convincing. I thought then, that a dialogue based on masquerades and masks is not out of place here.

Secondly, I considered its significance in the scene, knowing that Odili's mission here is one of great deception. He is not the only one involved, Mrs Nanga is involved and as a result, I decided that Edna has to play her own part in this game of deception to complete the circle by admitting Odili's false explanation of her tears to Mrs Nanga.

ODILI: She touched her eyes with pepper in her hands. She didn't know there was pepper on the dry meat and didn't wash her hands after serving me some.

My purpose here is to play around with the mask as a symbolic representation of the pretences and at the same time use the dialogue to idealize some masking behaviours; for I do not agree that every act of masking is negative. Stage drama itself is a mask and is often used to good effect. The Igbo themselves believe that you can mask to tell a tyrannical king the truth. The importance of this scene is that it makes a statement that touches on every character in the play because everyone is masking, but, as Odili quickly points out, "for different reasons." It does not only touch on every character in the play but it also touches the audience by addressing them through the use of dramatic irony. By this I mean that since in dramatic ironies, the playwright wittingly

²⁴⁷ Hutcheon, L, Ibid, p.4

lures the audience to become part of the action by revealing to them a secret which a character on stage is ignorant of, it means that dramatic ironies are also a direct address to the audience. The dramatic irony here stems from the knowledge which Odili shares with the audience regarding his mission and his plot with Mrs Nanga against Edna but to which Edna was oblivious. So, when Odili says, “Anyone can put on a mask”, the audience is included through the use of dramatic irony as a form of display in this scene.

The question then I had to ask is: why is everybody masking? My analysis is that their environment and the condition of life therein cause them to put on one type of *persona* or the other that is not truly theirs, falling for Marx and Engels’ argument that “It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness”²⁴⁸: Odili pretends to be a friend of Nanga and plays with him the comedy of Book Exhibition for Elsie to see, expecting some favour from the minister; he adopts the same friendly attitude in his approach to Mrs Nanga and to Edna (these two women represent Nanga’s household that Odili is penetrating through disguise); Mrs Nanga avoids losing out completely and therefore does not let her husband know her feelings regarding his proposal to marry Edna; Edna hides the fact that she does not love to marry Nanga because her family needs Nanga’s financial support. Somewhere else, Max pretends to be a compromising politician and accepts money from Koko but with no intention to step down; Mr Samalu agrees to everything Nanga says even when he does not know anything about the ten percent commissions the minister is talking about; and the people celebrate Nanga’s victory while at the same time wishing that they outlive him and his fellow ‘eaters’. This is where the concept of mask began to develop for the title of this adaptation.

I listed out different possible titles such as *A Nation of Masks*, *Kingdom of Masks*, *Maskrangers* and *The Maskingdom* and there was *A Season of Masks* which the director was using as his working title during the rehearsals while awaiting my final decision. Earlier, when I started writing the script, I had *Sharks of the Niger* as my working title which was as a result of a combined feeling I drew from the novel at first reading and the Nigerian political atmosphere where political assassinations had become the odour

²⁴⁸ Marx & Engels, *The German Ideology* (1976, Vol.5: p.36) Quoted by Loomba, A, Ibid, p.27

of the day. After getting feedback from my supervisors and other friends who are playwrights, I decided on *Kingdom of the Mask* because my thinking is that, in the end, it is the politicians and the political atmosphere that forced the characters to pretend to be what they do not intend to be. The characters are therefore reflecting the ruling class, which means, since (as it is apparent) they are masking, they are reflecting a bigger or rather, a ruling mask. Having already read Gikandi's description of Nanga as the consummate performer who causes others to change and forces them "to portray him according to their interests and desires"²⁴⁹, I made up my mind on Nanga as the mask figure that is responsible for all these duplicities. Significantly, the masking game takes place in his village house in his absence. His 'absence' becomes a big mask head which physically hides him as the cause of all that is going on in this scene. In that light, instead of *Kingdom of Masks*, I have *Kingdom of the Mask* bearing Nanga in mind; for in truth, he is the determiner of events in the narrative irrespective of the fact that Odili emerges as the hero.

I was satisfied with the mask concept and I could not have asked for more in my quest to investigate Igbo theatre, that is, its ability to work harmoniously with literary theatre for the good of society. Igbo traditional theatre is basically dance and masquerade performance. The masquerade performance is a form of dance itself though it produces more spectacle and has the aspect of ritual attached to it. Besides investigating Igbo theatre, the mask concept also provides a unifying metaphor for both themes of corruption (which relates to concealment) and enlightenment (which seeks to reveal what is concealed). As John Picton puts it, "The metaphorical utility of 'mask' draws upon all of this: the distancing capacity of the artifact; the properties of parody and pastiche; the 'mask' as revealing, proclaiming, hiding, denying, etc., personality, truth, etc...."²⁵⁰. Among other things, *Kingdom of the Mask*, as a title, reveals that the title from which it is adapted, *A Man of the People*, is nothing but an irony, a satire on the person of the Minister, Chief the Honorable M A Nanga. This is the sort of interpretation I wanted to bring to the novel through this adaptation, to make things clearer for my audience because when you see a mask moving, you know there is another face behind it. In that sense, the mask is as revealing as it is concealing; and in

²⁴⁹ Loc. Cit.

²⁵⁰ Picton, J, "What's in a Mask" in Harding, F (ed), *The Performance Arts in Africa: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, p.55

this adaptation, what is concealed that we try to reveal is political corruption embodied in the character, Nanga, who poses as ‘a man of the people.’

The Choice of Mask Concept and Other Elements of Indigenous Theatre

The mask concept stems from a personal conviction that there are no straightforward characters in the story. In addition to its figurative function, I also felt that it would give the adaptation a cultural undertone because of the role of masking in Igbo society. Masquerades, as already pointed out, are considered spirits that have appeared in human form though their faces are not visible.

The people revered the colonizers and nicknamed them *agbara* (spirits), which gave rise to the idiomatic expression: ‘*bekee wu agbara*’(white man is a spirit). Like a spirit, he was rarely seen but his influence was felt all around the communities. He governed through his agents. All those who worked for this “invisible presence and present absence”²⁵¹ - court clerks, interpreters and messengers were, ideologically, playing the same role as traditional masquerades that served as link between the people and the governing spirits and ancestors. These clerks, interpreters and messengers later metamorphosed into members of the political elites in post-independence Africa, serving as links between the people and the central government which remained remote from the people. Victor Ukaegbu writes that “Philosophically, Igbo masking sustains interactions between different cosmic zones, between the seen and unseen, between material and non-material entities”.²⁵² That the central government of post independence Africa is located in the unseen or, in computer language, ‘unknown zone’, is implied in Mr Samalu’s response to Odili: “If Alligator comes out of the water one morning and tells you that Crocodile is sick can you doubt his story?”(p.121). You cannot doubt the alligator’s testimony because the abode of the crocodile is virtually inaccessible. Odili had already testified to this inaccessibility, referring to the people as “silly, ignorant villagers” (p.2) and on another occasion affirming that even intellectuals like him, only “listened to whispers of scandalous deals” with no real “hard kernel of fact” to hold on to (p.39).

²⁵¹ Loc. Cit

²⁵² Ukaegbu, V, *The Use of Masks in Igbo Theatre in Nigeria*, Lewinton, The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd, 2007, p.30

Many critics acknowledge the distance between the people and the government as fundamental to the political problems in the post-independence era. For instance, Lindfors writes about Urua village which capitulated to Nanga's coercion. "The village is helpless in the sphere of national politics: it elects but does not control... Unlike the traditional communities of Umuofia and Umuaro, this constituency is at the mercy of the politicians who claim to represent it...."²⁵³ With no direct knowledge of the nature of the central government, the people only look up to these representatives who are prone to taking advantage of the people's lack of knowledge. As Benedict Njoku observed, "A man who has no access to his government is easily deceived by the empty promises."²⁵⁴ The government therefore was like a secret (masquerade) cult that included both the ordinary citizens and the intellectuals in its scope of bewilderment. For Odili, it is only by sitting at the feet of Chief Nanga that he receives enlightenment.

Chief Nanga is the alligator, the central government is the crocodile; he is the Mask, the central government is the spirit. He, Nanga, as Ukaegbu observes of Igbo masks, initiates "the presence of the otherworldly as well as give physical form to fictional and abstract qualities".²⁵⁵ When the people see him (Chief Nanga), they feel connected to the powers that be. He is the means through which the new nation-states are made real to the distanced villagers – word made flesh. According to Mezu,

He (Nanga) owns his constituency and all of its agencies of government. For the masses, his promise to get them a share of the "national cake" is a most potent tool of persuasion. In the eyes of the general populace, there is a disconnection between the people and government. Politics, and issues concerning governance are regarded as "their affair." Interpreters, court messengers, warrant chiefs, and now ministers are all considered go-between the people and the colonial government, and they were generally hated for their ruthlessness, high-handedness and proclivity to milk the people.²⁵⁶

It is, therefore, not mere coincidence that contemporary Igbo society refers to people in Nanga's position or very wealthy and well-connected individuals as '*nnukwu Mmanwu*' (the big mask/masquerade). It has become a socio-political idiom in Igbo land which I

²⁵³ Lindfors, *Critical Perspectives on Chinua Achebe*, Ibid, p.272

²⁵⁴ Njoku B C, *The Four Novels of Chinua Achebe*, Ibid, p.68

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p.63

²⁵⁶ Mezu, Ibid, p.115

found very pertinent in the conveyance of my dramatic intention to the public. Though *mmannwu* is rooted in the religious beliefs of the people, it is also at the centre of Igbo social life. What comes to mind when mention is made of Igbo theatre is the masquerade and dance because they are the two art forms that constitute the major spectacles in the land. According to Onuora Ossie Enekwe,

Igbo Drama/Theatre manifests itself through two main art forms – the mask and the dance. Masking, a major source of creativity in Igboland, combines several art forms, including music, costuming, sculpture, poetry dialogue, make-up and dance.²⁵⁷

Though Enekwe goes on to explain the dominance of dance over other art forms, he however, observes that masking provides the “force of an invocation that introduces extra-human forces into the human sphere”,²⁵⁸ therefore, into theatre. Enekwe speaks in defence of Igbo Mask Theatre against the school of thought that holds that masquerading in Africa cannot be considered complete drama.

In the past, Ruth Finnegan’s assessment of African drama in the light of European theatrical mode had generated arguments among Igbo scholars as to whether the masquerade could be considered a complete dramatic form. Finnegan writes in her work, *Oral Literature in Africa*:

Though some writers have very positively affirmed the existence of native African drama, it would perhaps be truer to say that in Africa, in contrast to Western Europe and Asia, drama is not typically a wide-spread or developed form.

There are, however, certain dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena to be found, particularly in parts of West Africa. Many are of great interest in themselves, particularly, perhaps, the celebrated masquerades of Southern Nigeria.²⁵⁹

Finnegan’s thesis on African Drama led to almost an endless debate among Igbo scholars over what constitutes Igbo drama and theatre. Michael JC Echeruo, toeing the path of Finnegan and attaching great importance to Aristotle’s *muthos* (plot), argued that dramatic elements could be extracted from rituals and developed into what he

²⁵⁷ Enekwe, O O, “Igbo Drama and Theatre” in Afigbo, A E (ed), *Groundwork of Igbo History*, Lagos, Vista Books, 1992, p.747

²⁵⁸ Op. Cit. p.747

²⁵⁹ Finnegan R, *Oral Literature in Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1970, p.500

considers ‘proper’ drama with ‘linguistic content, plot, represented interaction of several characters, specialized scenery’²⁶⁰ – elements listed by Finnegan that are absent from African Drama.²⁶¹ For Finnegan, it is by bringing all these together to enact a story that the performance could be considered drama and it is a ‘seldom’ occurrence in Africa. Against this idea Okagbue remarks: “and one wonders of course where these elements ever come together in a single performance”.²⁶²

Enekwe does not agree with Echeruo and Finnegan as he argues that masking, as a form of impersonation, is theatre as far as the Igbo are concerned.²⁶³ In his papers, “Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland” (1981) and “Igbo Drama and Theatre” (1991), Enekwe argues that it is wrong to conceive of theatre only in line with Aristotle’s *Poetics*, which advocates a properly organised *muthos* (plot) – a beginning, a middle and an end.²⁶⁴ In “Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland”, Enekwe writes that those in the opposing camp, whom Okagbue refer to as evolutionists, “fail to realise that Africans are not interested in portraying an Aristotelian action that is whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle and an end...”²⁶⁵ He continues his argument in a later paper, “Igbo Drama and Theatre” by stating that “Igbo mask theatre is essentially a symbolic actualization” of Igbo belief system which does not see a great divide between the living and the dead. Then he adds: “Through ritual symbolization and dramatization, the presence of the dead is made actual, and spirits “become not only instruments of social solidarity and communal affirmation, but entertainers who dramatize their own lives as well as those of the living.”²⁶⁶

While not contesting the above explanations of Igbo masquerade theatre, I disagree with Enekwe’s next statement that “Igbo mask theatre is not a story theatre.”²⁶⁷ To give Enekwe the benefit of the doubt, I interpret this to mean that Igbo mask theatre is not

²⁶⁰ Echeruo, MJC, “The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual” in Harding, Francis (ed), *The Performance Art in Africa: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 30 (first Published in Ogunbiyi (ed), *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical Source Book*, 1981)

²⁶¹ Finnegan, R, *Ibid*, p. 501

²⁶² Okagbue, *Ibid* p.4

²⁶³ Enekwe, *Loc. Cit.*

²⁶⁴ Aristotle, *Poetics* (A New Translation by Kenneth McLeish), London, Nick Hern Books, 1999, pp. 11-12

²⁶⁵ Enekwe, O, *Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igboland*, in Harding, Francis (ed), *The Performance Art in Africa: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 30 (first Published in Ogunbiyi [ed], *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: a critical Source Book*, 1981)

²⁶⁶ Enekwe, O O, “Igbo Drama and Theatre”, *Ibid*, p.748

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p.748

essentially a verbally oriented theatre. ‘Story’ can be told in different forms, even with static and symbolic images. After all, theatre, as in the words of Elaine Aston and George Savon, is a “sign system”²⁶⁸ and meaning can be decoded through semiotic inquiry. According to Pickering, structuralists like Roland Barthes have argued “that we are perpetually ‘reading’ messages in the objects that surround us, but they are messages not communicated in words.”²⁶⁹ Even Enekwe acknowledges this when he reflects on sculpture in his recent essay, “Beyond Entertainment: A Reflection on Drama and Theatre”: “By presenting a series of episodes that can be connected, sculptors can tell stories or express certain ideas.”²⁷⁰

Non-verbal images and representations such as sound, gesture, movement, costume, scenery, props and lighting are at the disposal of semiotics to interpret and uncover the stories being told on the stage. This is not different with masquerade theatre which tells a lot of stories with little (unwritten) or no verbal dialogue. For Achebe, the masquerade’s “artistic deployment of motion, of agility ... informs the Igbo concept of existence”.²⁷¹ This concept of existence is Igbo belief that we are in a “dynamic world of movement and of flux”²⁷² reflected in various forms of Igbo arts, especially dance, masquerade and mbari art forms. The absence of spoken words in these art forms does not take away their stories for the ‘knowledgeable ones’. Whatever the shortcomings in the argument, it is to the credit of Enekwe and others of this school of thought that we are reminded that theatre should function differently for different people. After all, it is what people consider to be drama that is drama for them. Enekwe’s school of thought definitely objects to the use of Western cultural parameters in the assessment of Igbo and other African cultural practices.

Okagbue refers to those in Enekwe’s school of thought as relativists and rightly so. Their position may not be tenable for those who believe that theatrical form depends on what Richard Schechner refers to as ‘vertical origin’ of theatre where, as in Greek theatre for instance, tragedy is an offshoot of the Dithyramb, and Dithyramb (the Greek

²⁶⁸ Aston E & Savona G, *Theatre as Sign-System, A semiotics of Text and Performance*, Routledge, London, 1991, (Book title).

²⁶⁹ Pickering, K, *Key Concepts in Drama and Performance*, Ibid, p.241

²⁷⁰ Enekwe, O O, ““Beyond Entertainment: A Reflection on Drama and Theatre”, in Okagbue O (ed), *African Performance Review* (Vol 3, No 1, 2009), London, Adonis & Abbey publishers, Ltd, 2009, p.17

²⁷¹ Achebe, C, “The Igbo World and Its Art,” Ibid, p.44

²⁷² Ibid, p.42

chorus that tells of the adventures of Dionysius) an offshoot of Greek Primal Rituals.²⁷³ The implication of a vertical origin, one would say, would be that drama or theatre around the world owes its origin and development to one source. As a result, what the Greeks call theatre and drama must be what the Igbo must call theatre and drama. Instead of such a vertical order, Schechner speaks of horizontal relationships which bestow autonomy to all the performance genres – ritual, play, games, sports, dance and music – with ‘performance’ as the unifying factor. All the different kinds, he writes, can always relate ‘intergenerically’ with each other. In support of the anthropologists, such as Turner, who postulate that drama has always existed in every human community, Schechner discards the idea of searching for the origin of theatre. “Theatre – understood as the enactment of stories by players – exists in every known culture at all times, as do the other genres.”²⁷⁴

The argument that Igbo theatre would have to follow the Greek pattern in order to evolve speaks volumes about the impact of colonization on contemporary Igbo, if not African, theatre. However, Okagbue observes that the arguments among Igbo scholars would have been unnecessary if there was terminological clarity:

What the scholars failed to take note of and question is the issue of whether or not every performance, every theatre event, has to be drama. And second was their failure to make any distinctions between the terms ‘drama’, ‘theatre’ and ‘performance.’ Unfortunately, the imprecision in terminology still persists today in a lot of the critical writings about performance, not only in African performance and theatre scholarship, but also in performance and theatre discourses worldwide. All the critics involved in the relativists versus evolutionists debate on the nature and status of African drama, performance and theatre frequently used the three terms interchangeably in their essays and books.²⁷⁵

Though bereft of knowledge of African Theatre, or more specifically, Igbo Theatre, Schechner saw the need to clarify these terminologies that are used concomitantly among theatre scholars and practitioners around the globe. An entire chapter of *Performance Theory*, is devoted to the confusion surrounding terms like drama, script, theatre and performance:

²⁷³ Schechner, R, *Performance Theory* (Revised and Expanded ed), Routledge, London, 1988, p.4

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p.7

²⁷⁵ Okagbue, O, Ibid, p.5

the drama is what the writer writes; the script is the interior map of a particular production; the theatre is the specific set of gestures performed by the performers in any given performance; the performance is the whole event, including audience and performers (technicians, too, anyone who is there).²⁷⁶

Schechner observes that not all theatres or performances are drama; if he were to arbitrate between the Igbo evolutionists and relativists, the verdict would be no winner or loser because the masquerade does not need to be drama in order to be theatre. Drama can exist inside and outside of theatre. Theatre itself is a subgroup of performance like sports and ritual. Okagbue thus rightly explains that Schechner used his oppositional dyad model of drama-script versus theatre-performance to conclude that to the extent that any culture emphasizes drama-script that is the extent to which it de-emphasizes theatre-performance and vice versa.²⁷⁷ Since the West has laid emphasis on drama-script in the last two centuries, the ensuing debate over the completeness of African performance form was inevitable because many African scholars are products of Western education.

Unfortunately, being products of Western education did not solve the nomenclatural problem between drama and theatre which made it difficult for the scholars to see the opposing camp's point of view. It seemed to me that the scholars who should have made a concerted effort to keep the theatre alive and functional in Igbo land were rather preoccupied with this argument. I was anxious that I had not quite fully comprehended the whole issue because the debate seemed to be adumbrated. My anxiety underscores the importance of Okagbue's work, *African Theatres and Performances*, published shortly after the production of my adaptation in 2007, in which he uses Schechner's approach to harmonize the debate among his fellows. Before then, I was of the opinion that instead of sitting down and waiting for this issue to be resolved, some 'performance' (drama-theatre) should be going on in the land with a considerable level of consistency. It was against this background of dissatisfaction with the scholars' debate that I thought that the maximization of the mask concept in my adaptation should be allowed, to show that Igbo performance forms – masquerade and dance – can form a synergy with the literary theatre to tell our stories.

²⁷⁶ Schechner, R, Ibid, p.87

²⁷⁷ Okagbue, O, Ibid, p.6

My view is that the decaying nature of our society today requires that theatre should be both entertaining and educative. A combination of literary drama (theatre) and masquerade theatre is certainly apposite to our generation that hardly recognises the religious and moral import of the masquerade theatre. Literary theatre such as this adaptation can help the people to begin to reconstruct meaning as in the masquerade theatre. In my adaptation for instance, the audience was able to see the masquerades in a confrontational dance (Act 3 Scene 4), a symbolic representation of the confrontations between Odili and Nanga. Such a performance could help the audience to look out for symbols in the traditional masquerade theatre. Incorporating the masquerade and other forms of traditional theatre into literary theatre, in my opinion, would invigorate our performances on one hand and on the other hand, rekindle interest in the traditional theatre as symbolic and meaningful art forms.

As an amateur practitioner working with my group, Alvana Catholic Young Voices, I successfully incorporated cultural elements in my plays such as dance and music in the production of *Nkemakolam* (Owerri, 1996), the first Odenigbo dramatic performance and *Lamentations, Hopes and Carols* (Owerri, 1994). Back to Owerri, in 2007, I was in no doubt that the masquerade, dance, music and games would enhance the production of my adaptation, *Kingdom of the Mask*. In the process of seeking how the theatre can help to tell our people the stories of the novels, I therefore became interested in experimenting with how the Igbo cultural performance forms could be fused into the literary theatre to create an avant-garde in Igbo theatrical tradition or an alternative theatre.

Since my fundamental aim is to render the people's story back to them through a more accessible medium, it is important that elements of cultural performances are included to get the audience involved because life and art for the Igbo, traditionally, are participatory and communal. Using Simon Ottenberg's observations of a performance in Igbo land (Afikpo) as reference point, David Kerr writes:

The notion of a communal, sharing, pre-colonial society has found a theatrical equivalent in an aesthetic emphasis on African theatre's anonymous, participatory qualities. Even anthropologically inclined studies from the late colonial era

commented on the participatory quality of indigenous African theatre. For example, in a study of the *Okumkpa* masked plays among Nigeria's Afikpo people, Ottenberg explains how the absence of raked seating caused problems with sightlines. As a result, play leaders had to move around the audience interpreting the play for the audience. Ottenberg comments that this caused 'a slackening in dramatic tension but increased audience-player interaction'.²⁷⁸

Surely, Ottenberg must have observed from other aspects of Igbo arts that the absence of raked seats and the problems of sightlines were not the fundamental reasons for the participatory mode of the performance. It is an integral part of Igbo people and many other African communities. Achebe himself quotes Ottenberg's observation of an Igbo carver working on a ritual mask but was constantly being advised by others, even by those who could not carve. "He is not offended by their suggestions... I felt myself that he rather enjoyed the company."²⁷⁹

The Igbo fully participate in the masquerade theatre as the maskers engage them in mini dialogues and chase them around. Everyone moves around to take a vantage viewpoint to see the masquerade – hence, the saying, 'you do not stand in one place to watch the masquerade.' In the dance theatre, audiences freely participate in the dancing and other times, the dancers engage individuals and demand that they dance with them. Noises of all kinds are made by the audience in approbation of an individual dancer or the whole group of dancers. Sometimes, the performers participate like the spectators and join in the admiration of fellow performers or members of the audience showcasing their own talents. It is in recognition of the force which this audience participation adds to African performances that Kerr proposes that modern post-independence African theatre practitioners should "return to the collective 'socialist' ethos of pre-colonial African theatre."²⁸⁰ In adapting *A Man of the People*, the following elements were drawn from the traditional theatre and recreational activities: masquerade, dance, music and games, to help engage the audience and get them involved in my retelling of the story of *A Man of the People*.

²⁷⁸ Kerr, D, *African Popular Theatre*, Oxford, James Currey, 1995, p.2

²⁷⁹ Simon Ottenberg, *Masked Rituals of Afikpo* (Seattle & London, Uni of Washington Press, 1975, p.74) quoted in Achebe, C, "The Writer and His Community" in *Hopes and Impediments*, Ibid, p.39

²⁸⁰ Kerr, D, Op. Cit.

Chapter Five

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE ADAPTATION AND PERFORMANCE

Despite the praise and post- performance speeches by highly placed members of society who were at the performances, I still recognised that the performance script was only a working document to put the adaptation on stage in order to meet the schedule for my PhD. In one sense, the script was not ready. The poor video recording, especially the sound quality, also helped to expose some areas that needed adjustments in the performance script. In September 2007, when I screened the video to a London audience, about forty percent commented on the poor audio quality. That led me to consider cutting down some areas with lengthy dialogues. During the preparations and rehearsals for performance, the script was in constant motion, moving to and fro, between the director and myself. Under that condition, it came to a point where what was important to me was to put the play on stage, confident that the performance must not necessarily pass for the final script. Publishing his adaptation of Achebe's *Arrow of God* titled *When the Arrow Rebounds*, Emeka Nwabueze writes in his acknowledgements, "...I wish to express my gratitude to all the scholars from all over the world who watched the premier of *When the Arrow Rebounds*. Many of them personally made critical comments and suggestions to me most of which I have incorporated into this final version."²⁸¹ This gave me the confidence that it is not out of place to continue working on a script after the first performance of it.

Another reason is the fact that from the time of the stage production (Feb 2007), in the course of writing up this dissertation, I have had the chance to read more commentaries on the adapted text, more critical works on fiction and on drama and theatre and also had more opportunities to go to theatres. These have influenced the changes I made to the script. One of such influences come from Peter Brook's *The Empty Space* in which he argues that the theatre is a living thing and should be able to adapt to the changes in life.

Life is moving, influences are playing on the actor and audience,
and other plays, other arts, the cinema, television, current events,

²⁸¹ Nwabueze, E, *When the Arrow Rebounds: A Dramatized Recreation of Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God*, Enugu, ABIC Books and Equip. Ltd, 2005, p.4

join in the constant rewriting of history and the amending of the daily truth.... A living theatre that thinks it can stand aloof from anything so trivial as fashion will wilt. In the theatre, every form once born is mortal; every form must be reconceived, and its new conception will bear the marks of all the influences that surround it.²⁸²

Observing the changes taking place in Nigeria has actually influenced some of the decisions I have taken in making these changes. A significant change in this Final Draft is the opening scene which is now a hospital setting. The hospital symbolises ill health and healing where lives in need of physicians and recovery are found. The reason for this choice is that I believe the Nigerian political world, which this story is based on, has moved more steps backwards from the time of production to this period of rewrite. The new President, Musa Yar'Adua spends approximately forty-five percent of his days in hospitals overseas and hardly any week passes without a major headline in the Nigerian newspapers describing Nigeria as a "failed State". This is the verdict, not only of well-meaning Nigerians but also of world diplomats. The report on Hilary Clinton's visit to Nigeria in 2009 by the Daily Independent reads:

Indeed, regardless of the initial posturing of Aso Rock*, which observers believe was meant to censure her saber-rattling in Angola, Clinton successfully handed down her message: Nigeria is a failing state and the rescue mission now goes beyond its official handlers.²⁸³

If for Clinton Nigeria is still in the failing process, Nigerians believe it has failed. The Guardian reports: "Nigeria's inability to record development in almost every area of its national life is an indication that it is a failed state, according to some of the country's prominent citizens."²⁸⁴ A failed state is not healthy and the most appropriate place for it is a hospital and that is where this draft starts.

Thinking of a failed state, I came to the realisation that our society needs more of its citizens to be transformed (as Odili was in the novel) for its recovery. I thought it was

²⁸² Brook, P, Ibid, p.19

* Aso Rock is a metonym for the Presidency in Nigeria.

²⁸³ Igboanugo S and Ajakaye, R (Reporters): "Clinton: Opening the Road to the Battle Ring," in *Daily Independent* (<http://odili.net/news/source/2009/aug/19/417.html>), Wednesday, August 19, 2009

²⁸⁴ *The Guardian* (<http://odili.net/news/source/2009/feb/6/16.html>) Friday, February 6, 2009

good to allow people the chance to change their positions and refine their intentions for the good of society. We need to create a world, like the story of Omenụkọ (hero of the first Igbo novel in Igbo language, *Omenụkọ*) where those who have made mistakes in the past can play a positive part for a better future; for if we must wait for a perfect or near perfect man to save our society, we may wait forever. For this reason, I showed a bit more about Odili's selfishness and pretence in his relationship with Nanga and Edna, what he thinks about the political society and politicians and how he wants to exploit them through Nanga. In Act 1 Scene 2, he makes it known that he doesn't like Chief Nanga but wants to exploit the situation to get post graduate scholarship. In his commentary that follows, Odili shows his readiness to follow the status quo, which does not appreciate 'what' you know but 'who' you know, to get what he wants. He repeats this intention to Elsie in Act 1 Scene 4. In reference to Edna, I have also shown in this draft that Odili is attracted to her even before Nanga sleeps with Elsie which is one of the aspects my stage director considered in his analysis of Odili's character in staging the Performance Script. In addition to using this to show that Odili is a pretender, I also wanted to use it to increase the dramatic irony in Act 2 Scene 2 when Odili speaks to Mrs Nanga concerning Edna.

In Chapter Three, I indicated my intention to deviate from Achebe when it comes to the marriage between Odili and Edna. My stage director favoured the marriage beat based on what he thinks is uppermost in a woman's mind but which I do not agree with. I have, however, gone ahead in this draft to give more attention to this marriage not because of what my director thinks, but because of a new understanding of the novel, which appealed to me through further reading. By reading further, I have come to appreciate the marriage metaphor running as a subplot to the main political story in the novel. It seems to me that Achebe is using the relationship between Edna, Odili and Nanga to analyse and chart a way forward for the new nation states in Africa in which unrelated nationalities were forced into a union to form one country. Through these characters, Achebe seems to suggest that a relationship that forms a peaceful and just society would have to be entered into freely without any form of coercion by the parties involved. The family is the nucleus of every society for "two sexes" according to H S Ferns & K W Watkins is "one essential ingredient of all communities"²⁸⁵ and

²⁸⁵ Ferns H S & Watkins KW, *What Politics is About*, London, The Sherwood Press Ltd, 1985, p.4

therefore it becomes essential that the formation of the family should set the standard for political and other types of human relationships.

As Brook says, ‘life is moving’. As a result, this Final Draft may not be relevant to this Nigerian political world which the Igbo inhabit in another one or two years. I call this the Final Draft for the purpose of my PhD and not a draft that would resist change in the future. In this draft, therefore, changes have been made with regard to structure, characters, and content, which I will briefly explain below.

Structure: I decided to use the cyclical or reminiscence structure in this Final Draft. The structure is more complex than the linear structure, which I used in the Performance Script. The play is a three-act play and it begins with the present in Act 1 Scene 1, goes into the past from Act 1 Scene 2 and then returns to the present in Act 3 Scene 1 from where it continues in a linear progression to the end. Reminiscence is one of the earlier structures I thought of, not only because adaptation involves memory and change²⁸⁶, but also because Odili narrated the story in the novel retrospectively. My desire for reminiscence was rekindled earlier in 2009, after watching *The Hounding of David Oluwale*, a historical story by Kester Aspden and adapted by Oladipo (Dipo) Agboluaje. I went back to my script with my mind made up on applying this structure to my adaptation.

The first thing I needed to decide on was where the story begins. I wanted Odili to begin his story when Edna visited him as he was recuperating. With that approach, I saw that I was going to encounter great difficulty, dramatizing the Election scene from which Odili was absent. Moreover, the scene – the visit of Edna – did not appear exciting enough to me to capture the audience attention at the start of the play. For my purpose, I wanted to keep the election scene and so needed to work out Odili’s involvement as the narrator of the story. To do this, first, I took the same liberty as Dipo took in raising David Oluwale to tell his story, by using the unconscious Odili to tell his story up to the point where he is hospitalised and make him regain consciousness to ask the question: “When is the election?” (Act 3 Scene 1). I reasoned

²⁸⁶ Hutcheon, L, Ibid, p.173

that if an artist is expected to know the fictional universe he creates²⁸⁷, he should also be allowed to exercise a God-like power in that fictional universe, to raise the dead and make the unconscious speak consciously. Odili's unconscious state is signalled by the freezing of Nanga and Edna, and Odili says: "...In case I don't ever wake up, will you tell Edna and tell my father..." (Act 1 Scene 1). This line indicates that Edna and Mr Samalu are absent from the unconscious realm where this narration is taking place. When Odili wakes in Act 3 Scene 1 and asks, "When is the election?", he falls back into a trance and dreams of the election. After the election he wakes, startled, proclaiming that Nanga has won. His father makes him understand that he has been dreaming and calms him down and that leads him into another trance to dream of the four village youths celebrating Nanga's victory. He wakes again and tells his father of his dream. The audience witnesses the dreams as they occur.

In theatre convention, Odili's story is an aside; it is between him and the audience and not with the other characters on stage. The events the audience sees and hears occur in Odili's head like a dream, and like a dream which Sigmund Freud argues is filled with distortions,²⁸⁸ there is the inevitability of displacements, compressions, fill-ins and even gaps in the story. This is what adaptations are like, because not all incidents are taken from the original and certain beats, lines or ideas are lifted from one area of the original text and employed in another area of the script. Distortions occur all over the script and from the beginning of the narration as in Act 1 Scene 2 where Mr Samalu becomes the announcer during Nanga's visit to Anata. He is nowhere near this event in the novel. My decision to use him here is because Odili's mental position in narrating his story in the novel, many times, is to justify his errors, which is what really happens when someone is looking back on a failed relationship and is trying to evade culpability. This is why Gikandi refers to him as an unreliable reporter when he writes that

Odili's representation of himself and others is determined by the simple need to protect his ego, to project a certain image of

²⁸⁷ Mckee R, *Story*, Ibid, 71.

²⁸⁸ Freud, S, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (3rd Ed) (Trans by A. A. Brill) (Online: <http://www.psychwww.com/books/interp/toc.htm>)

himself and to condition the way other characters view his condition.²⁸⁹

In view of this, I decided on a psychoanalytical approach to his meeting Nanga, reasoning that Odili would have wished to have another person blamed for his accepting Nanga's invitation to Bori. In the novel (pp. 17-18) Odili shows his intention to use rationalization and projection as defence mechanisms by blaming the country for operating on the principle of *who* you know and not *what* you know and also by telling us that "It was the Minister himself who came back to the post-graduate question... without any prompting whatever from me." I reasoned that since he was making good effort to keep his pride in narrating this event, some kind of displacement and distortion would be inevitable if he is recycling the story in the unconscious. Someone needed to share, if not take, the blame and I found his father, Mr Samalu, in a good position to do so. First, I took advantage of his position as the local Chairman of Nanga's party (POP) to foist him on the podium to receive Nanga since Urua and Anata are within the same constituency. Second, he is at the centre of Odili's mental projection of a society, which does not believe that "a sensible man would spit out the juicy morsel that good fortune placed in his mouth"(p.2); and he thinks that Odili has had more than enough education and should be looking for a decent job other than teaching, to buy himself a car (p.31). It was after considering all these that I decided to project Mr Samalu as the instigator who wanted to take advantage of Nanga's visit to help Odili get a better job. Through this psychoanalytical process, I was able to compress together the whole story of Odili as a detached individual with a desire to obtain a postgraduate scholarship, his regrets in seeking Nanga's help for this scholarship and Mr Samalu's desire for him to get a better job.

This structure offers us two periods for the drama: the present and the past, and these are signalled as Present and Memory respectively. The story begins with the present, then goes into the past and then returns to the present. When the play returns to the present, Odili concludes his story as he began: "Tell my story to my father. He warned me not to approach Nanga's rally. Tell it to Edna: she was the only one who tried to save me." The narration ceases here and the audience experiences the rest of the story

²⁸⁹ Gikandi, S, p.120

as it unfolds in a linear sequence. This structure appears mentally more engaging than the linear structure of the Performance Script and I am of the opinion that it would create a good balance for the audience in this didactic play with lots of entertaining elements from traditional theatre.

Characters: In this final version, new characters are introduced while some other characters in the Performance Script have been excluded. Introduced into this draft are Chief Koko, Doctor, Nurse, Principal, Jalio, Rafi (CPC member), Josiah, The Blind Man, another Villager (Nanga's thug) and Mr Odo (Edna's father). On the other hand, four characters were dropped from the performance script: the Hawker, Eddy (Nanga's daughter), 1ST Man and 2ND Man. The experience of the stage productions encouraged me to include more characters. There were thirty actors in all who appeared on stage for each performance. I thought it was a very large cast (Fig. 12, below) and that the number was underutilised. I have included more characters, confident that even if fewer actors are available, then actors can take more than one role as in Dipo's play, *Christ of the Coldharbour Lane*, which ran in June 2007 at the Soho Theatre, West End. Doubling in many cases, as Griffiths argues, "can also add greatly to the resonances of a play"²⁹⁰ especially a play that is eloquent on duplicity and corruption like *Kingdom of the Mask*. In this script, the actor playing Mr Samalu can conveniently play Mr Odo while the actress playing Elsie can double for the Nurse or Edna. The important thing, as Griffiths observed is for the actors to research each role deeply "so as to have at hand the important details that prevent the characters being merely larger than life. It is these details that are exaggerated and not the general, stereotyped aspects of the characters".²⁹¹ In any case, the preponderance of communalism in Achebe's novels and other Igbo novels make the choice of a large cast very appealing.

Some major characters like Edna and Mr Samalu are now introduced into the play early on, unlike in the Performance Script where Edna first appeared in Act 2 Scene 3 and Mr Samalu in Act 3 Scene 2. In this draft both appear in the first two scenes of the play. Some characters' appearances are also increased in this draft. Elsie is one of such characters, whose role in the play is not commensurate with her appearance. The audience is hereby given the chance to know a bit more about her and assess her

²⁹⁰ Griffiths, T, *Stagecraft*, Ibid, p.16

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 69

relationship with Odili before she is seduced by money and power. Again, my new understanding of the importance of Odili's relationship with Edna caused me to increase Edna's appearances in relation to Odili. In addition to Edna's activities in the Performance Script, she visits Odili in the hospital, accompanies Nanga on his visit to Anata Grammar School and is visited by Odili in her home before they meet at Mrs Nanga's house. Odili's prior meeting with Edna before meeting her at Mrs Nanga's house increases the dramatic irony of the scene which is characterised by masking and deception. This approach imbues in the audience a feeling of importance, aware that they are sharing a secret with Odili. In this way, the rapport between Odili and the audience is being developed since it is my intention to make Odili the educator and agent of enlightenment.



Fig. 12: Actors take their bow after performance.

Content: To show more is a driving force in this draft. In this draft, I have no need for the Hawker's story regarding the coffee drama because the audience can see it for themselves. According to Rib Davies, "Showing is almost always more vivid, more memorable than telling."²⁹² Davies clarifies that this does not mean action without

²⁹² Davies, R, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts*, London, A & C Black Pub. Ltd, 2003, p.63

dialogue, rather, that events are not just spoken about through dialogue but that the audience should be able to witness events including the dialogue.²⁹³ For this reason, I showed more incidents in this Final Draft than in the Performance Script. Some of the scenes added in this Final Draft were referred to a number of times in the dialogues of the Performance Script which signalled their importance to the story. For example, Nanga's visit to Anata was mentioned during the introduction of Elsie and in the dialogue between Max and Odili. I thought, showing the event would be more effective than just referring to them. The newly added scenes are:

Act 1 Scene 1: (Present) Odili in the Hospital

Act 1 Scene 2: Nanga's Visit to Anata Grammar School

Act 1 Scene 3: Coffee Drama at Chief Koko's House

Act 1 Scene 4: Odili visits Elsie

Act 1 Scene 7: Odili joins Max and CPC members

Act 2 Scene 1: Odili returns to the village, witnesses Josiah episode and begins to woo Edna.

Act 3 Scene 1: (Present) Max visits Odili in Hospital with New Nomination Paper.

In some places, actions are interwoven with Odili's commentary because they form part of the narration; such events are annexed to preceding or following scenes. Examples are the ostracism of Josiah which shares the same Act 2 Scene 1 with Odili's visit to Edna and Odili's experiences of Anata confrontations, involving the Principal, Mrs Nanga, Edna and the villagers respectively in Act 2 Scene 5. I have not included this among the new scenes because it is an adjustment of the confrontational scene between Odili and Edna in the performance script.

Another reason for this rewrite is clarity. Milton Polsky admonishes the playwright to take "the responsibility and challenge of sorting out an enormous amount of details and making them clear enough to an audience that may know almost nothing about the original source".²⁹⁴ For some of the existing scenes, little beats are added here and there for clarity. So, Act 1 Scene 6 ends with actual verbal exchange between Odili and Nanga concerning Elsie, unlike in the Performance Script where the audience learns there was such confrontation when Odili speaks to Max about the incident. This is to

²⁹³ Loc. Cit.

²⁹⁴ Polsky, M, *You Can Write A Play*, Ibid, p.133

add to the lessons that the audience learns on courage. It is not clear from the Performance Script that Boniface and his colleague (Odili's thugs) decamped to join Nanga's thugs. This has been made clear in this Final Draft in Act 2 Scene 3. Odili confirms this defection in the next scene when reproaching Max for taking money from Koko.

Such additional changes are very common in this Final Draft, including the beat that ends the play. In the Performance Script, I played down the military coup because the target audience for this adaptation are fed up with the army. This draft still upholds that need but instead of sending the message vocally alone, a visual presentation is included, so that the audience can see for themselves how tyrannical the military can be. For this beat, the military parades the corrupt politicians with the people dancing with them and celebrating the fall of Nanga and his cronies whose return to power they also celebrated. A soldier then turns to the people, taking a female dancer by force. The people's protest earns them a violent attack from the whole band of the army and after terrorizing the people, the army commander calls everybody to "Attention!" to end the play. The audience are now left to compare and decide which of the two evils is preferable – the corrupt civilian government or the military dictatorship. Unfortunately, though, the people cannot ask 'which is better?' but 'which is worse': taking a young woman by the force of a gun or seducing them with money and power?

The changes allow the audience to see more of the incidents in the novel and draw their own conclusions. In writing the Performance Script, I was telling more instead of showing the audience more as could be seen in the dialogues between Odili and Max (Act 1 Scene 4) and the two villagers, 1ST Man and 2ND Man (Act 3 Scene 6). While the scene between Odili and Max in the Performance Script has been transformed into a more exciting meeting of the CPC members in this Final Draft, the scene between 1ST Man and 2ND is excluded from this draft to give the audience the chance to analyse the situation themselves. According to the playwright, Dipo, "The worst thing we can do as writers is to underrate our audience. The fact is that the audience is more intelligent than us. Show them what you want to show them, let there be more drama, they will understand."²⁹⁵ I cannot disagree with Dipo here because if adaptations are meant to

²⁹⁵ A private conversation with Agboluaje, Oladipo, London, July, 2009

“keep the prior work alive”²⁹⁶ by bringing it to the stage, and if “theatre experience is the act of seeing and being seen”²⁹⁷, then it becomes imperative that the work of an adaptor is to show more and tell less.

²⁹⁶ Hutcheon, L, Ibid, p.176

²⁹⁷ Barranger, M S, *Theatre: A Way of Seeing* (2nd Ed).

CONCLUSION

Adapting *A Man of the People* was a profound experience for me. This research brought me closer to Igbo and African literatures, especially the novels, and it has helped me to better appreciate the creative impulse of African writers, especially Chinua Achebe. From *A Man of the People*, I learnt more about post independence Africa – why it has been very difficult to operate an effective political system in most African countries. My adaptation of this particular novel in itself is like a retrospection (as in Odili's narration), inquiring from our past the reasons for our present socio-political and economic predicaments. In that past, I discovered that independence from the colonial regime was only a facade, or in the words of Fanon, “an empty shell, a crude and fragile travesty of what it might have been.”²⁹⁸ National consciousness before independence was laden with hope and promises of the fruits of freedom but after independence it became a source of despair; and because of what Fanon calls the “intellectual laziness of the national middle class”²⁹⁹, the damage which the political elites did to this national consciousness could not be repaired as what each generation of politicians bequeath a succeeding generation is more corruption and brutal capitalism. This is why *A Man of the People* has remained very relevant for us to retell as a story to contemporary Igbo, Nigerian and African societies. This PhD research suggests that in retelling such stories, we should give attention to performance, stage drama, as the medium of transmission, taking the stories from the novel to the stage to enable the people to experience the stories together.

In writing the adaptation script, I have developed more discipline as a writer to go through the rigours of writing a play. As an amateur playwright, I always started off writing the dialogue without first working out how each Act or Scene relates to the rest of the story. Under the supervision of James Charlton I had to write a synopsis of the play to produce a clear-cut premise and in order to understand what I was actually aiming at. Then I was required to create the scenes and summarise what each scene is all about and how they relate to each other before ever thinking of writing the dialogue. Dialogue, as Rib Davis rightly observes, would be of very little use if it is not placed within a context.³⁰⁰ Ordinarily, one might think that writing dialogue in adaptations is

²⁹⁸ Fanon, F, Ibid, 119

²⁹⁹ Op. Cit.

³⁰⁰ Davis, R, *Writing Dialogue for Scripts* (2nd ed), London, A & C Black, 2003, p.2

easy because of the availability of the original text but as Duruaku pointed out during my interview with him, adaptations are more difficult than writing one's own play from scratch and that is why he thinks it is not common in Igbo society.³⁰¹

During the writing of the script and the critical work, I experienced the loneliness, the writer's block and the attendant frustrations of finding out later that the lines I thought were fantastic were trashed by my supervisors' pens. There were so many re-writes that I lost count. Sometimes, these experiences translated into depressive moments that did not even allow me to read. Ironically, it is the act of reading that always provided me the antidote for such mental states, providing the inspiration to start off again. It is in reading that I discovered as in the words of St Peter, that "your brothers all over the world are suffering the same things"³⁰²; that writers of note also experience these challenging moments which of course, they all have to overcome to excel as writers. For instance, when Charlton comments, "The writer's own journey – well, who is interested except his or her own family and friends?"³⁰³, there is a sense in which he is acknowledging Mckee's view that "You must love to write and bear the loneliness."³⁰⁴ Even with family and friends, loneliness was still inevitable. Such moments were rooted in the feeling that as an adaptor, I was recreating a world and only I knew why and what I wanted this world to be like. As a result, whenever I got stuck, I felt only I could get the wheel rolling once more and provide the answers required by my target audience to explore this world that I am recreating.

There was always a call by my supervisors to read more and more and their feedback led to many rewrites. Normally, these actions provided their own anxieties and frustrations but through reading I understood that 'reading' and 'rewrites' are common place among established writers. In his introduction to *The Handbook of Creative Writing*, Steven Earnshaw admonishes that

Any practising writer will tell you that re-writing or redrafting is the hardest thing. After all, inspiration is easy: you just have to be there. John Dale serves up the following advice. 'Thomas Mann

³⁰¹ Duruaku, ABC, Interview, Ibid.

³⁰² 1Peter, 5:9

³⁰³ Charlton, J, "Just Whose Journey is This? A Radical Approach to the Question of the 'Journey' Taken in Scripts", in Butt, M, Ibid, p.111

³⁰⁴ Mckee, R, Ibid, p.21

said that a writer is somebody for whom writing is more difficult than it is for other people. And it's true. Good writing is hard work and looks easy. It has energy yet never appears rushed'. So just as you will be urged to read, you will be urged to re-write, to revise, to redraft. Be your 'inner editor', as Crawford Kilian puts it.³⁰⁵

The reading and rewriting hurdles along this lonely road of a writer can only lead to a rewarding outcome. I appreciate those exercises because they have always inspired and challenged my imagination; and imagination, according to Butt, is the source of power for the stories we create:

Stories are powerful because they represent the imagination in action. Imagination comes from the same root word as magic. The power of the imagination – like magic – can bring about change. Stories can change the way people feel and act. And I'm not just thinking of the stories which form the basis of the major world religions. I'm thinking of Dickens, bringing a range of social ills to the attention of the public; of the poetry of Wilfred Owen and the other First World War poets who changed forever our idea the war is clean and heroic....³⁰⁶

I consider it very rewarding for a writer who writes for a positive change in society to learn that his stories are changing people's way of behaviour and worldview, although, for some writers, their jobs are done when their works are published and their joys like that of child birth dissipate the pangs of labour. Unfortunately, some of the writings aimed at educating the public do not permeate society as they should, especially a society with retrogressive reading habits like mine – the Igbo. The novel, *A Man of the People*, has been among us (and Nigerians) since 1966 but not many people talk about it; and society has not taken any recognisable honest steps towards addressing the political issues raised in the novel. I felt that I made the right choice dramatizing the novel because four days after the production of the adaptation, *Kingdom of the Mask*, a member of the intellectual elite in Owerri opened up to me regarding his involvement in the rigging of 2003 elections for his local government chairman. It was like a remorseful confession which he started by saying "How do you know about this? I was really touched by the masking thing (demonstrating the maskers flipping of their masks off and on their faces). I was asking myself questions...." He had to ask himself questions because for what he has achieved in society and his demeanour, he is the least

³⁰⁵ Earnshaw, S (Ed), "Introduction" to *A Handbook of Creative Writing*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh Uni Press, 2007, p.5

³⁰⁶ Butt, M, "Introduction: Magic and Imagination" in Butt, M (ed), *Ibid*, p.xviii

likely person anyone would think would get involved in the corrupt Nigerian politics. The theme song, *I marala onye m bu?* (Do you really know who I am?), in that case, applied to him. Not only for him but for many others who witnessed the performance and through their responses testified that the masking sequences were magical in forcing self interrogation. One of the responses, from Nkechi Njoku, recorded by the stage director, was

I feel quite naked and exposed now you know. I have various masks I flip on from time to time, but I didn't think anyone knew. I watched this show the first night and today. This play has hit me like a hammer. I wish Achebe were here. Can you take it (the play) around?³⁰⁷

These responses are testimonies to the immediate impact which drama and theatre have on the audience and they are what I consider the fruits of the playwright's labour. Society cannot change without individuals changing their ways of 'feeling and acting'. My argument is that a feeling of communality, of togetherness, that 'I am not alone' in this, aids individuals to make a change. This communality or sense of togetherness provides the foundation on which the efficacy of a stage performance is built. In my view, that is why Baz Kershaw argues that information passed through the theatrical medium, especially when they connect with the ideologies of the audience, can significantly change society.³⁰⁸

In his preface to his book, *The Theatre of the French Revolution*, Marvin Carlson observed that the theatre was closely watched during the years of revolution and what the actors said on stage changed rapidly to adjust to each government or to the people.³⁰⁹ Another writer, Michele Root-Bernstein, noted that during that period, "prime ministers and kings concerned themselves personally with theatrical affairs....sought to regulate the behaviour of actors and troupes".³¹⁰ Such interests testify that theatre is a very powerful means of information and it influences public opinion. According to Augusto Boal, "The theatre is a weapon, and it is the people who

³⁰⁷ Duruaku, "Medium and Meaning", Ibid, p.13

³⁰⁸ Kershaw, B, "Performance, Community, Culture", in Kuppers, P and Robertson, G, *The Community Performance Reader*, London, Routledge, 2007, p.81

³⁰⁹ Carlson, M, *The Theatre of the French Revolution*, NY, Cornell Uni Press, 1966, p.v

³¹⁰ Bernstein, M R, *Boulevard Theater and Eighteenth-Century Paris*, Michigan, Umi Research Press, 1984, p.1

should wield it.”³¹¹ Colin Makerras shows from his account that drama played no small role in the Chinese revolution and resistance. According to him, the Chinese Popular Drama Society declared in 1921 that “theater (*sic*) occupies an important place in modern society, it is a wheel which impels society forward, and it is also an X-ray which seeks out the basic faults of society.”³¹² During that year (1921) when Chinese Communist Party was set up, they understood the value of drama and organised troupes that presented performances to further their revolutionary cause.³¹³

The efficacy of drama not only stems from its immediacy and potentially communal character but because it is an art form that is transmitted, using human beings as means of representation and that is why Plato dreaded it so much.³¹⁴ In the words of Boal, “the first word of the theatrical vocabulary is the human body, the main source of sound and movement”.³¹⁵ Besides, stage drama can conveniently incorporate other art forms outside of theatre such as paintings and sculpture as well as blend with other theatrical types such as music, dance and games.

In pre-colonial Africa, theatre in most places took the form of rituals, dance and songs. They celebrated the reality of the people’s lives and their beliefs. As it was among the Gikuyu, so it was among the Igbo, Yoruba and other ethnic nationalities that had rituals to celebrate their gods and goddesses, fertility, naming, marriages, title taking, death and even the struggles with natural and human forces. The rituals are dramatized and within the rituals and celebrations, theatre occurs. That theatre, among the Igbo, involved different kinds of activities and dances but was dominated by the masquerade dance and displays. With an annual event, like the New Yam Festival (*Ahajioku*), the masquerade and other theatrical elements such as songs were used to tell the people’s stories about themselves and their worldview. The performances reminded the people that their world did not consist of the living alone, but also of the dead and the spirits/gods who were represented by the masquerades. The concept of the *invisible*

³¹¹ Boal, A, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, London, Pluto Press, P.122

³¹² Makerras, C, “Theater and the Masses”, in Makerras, C (ed), *Chinese Theater: From Its Origins to the Present Day*, Honolulu, Uni of Hawaii press, 1983. P.146

³¹³ Ibid, p.147

³¹⁴ Cf Plato, *The Republic* (603c & 605b).

³¹⁵ Boal, A, Ibid, p.125

present (as used by Duerden),³¹⁶ or *absent-presence* (as used by Okagbue) therefore, meant that the masquerade theatre was a concretization of the stories that parents told their children regarding their world. The masquerade theatre created such an impact about the reality of Igbo beliefs in the spirit and ancestral world, the presence of the ancestors and the gods within the community and their participation in the affairs of the community. Francis Harding rightly observes that

In Africa, and throughout the world, performing makes visible the unseen and makes present that which is in the past or in the future, manipulating space and time and challenging social and natural order. Each form of performance is, for its duration, an interface between a revealed reality and a revealed unreality, for that which is seen is what cannot ordinarily be seen, that which may not ordinarily exist. Within a staged context, illusion and reality become equal.³¹⁷

Since the Igbo people believe that the unseen-spirit-world is superior to the material universe, individuals became consciously and unconsciously controlled in their behaviours by this presence of the invisible. In other words, Igbo pre-colonial theatre, especially the masquerade theatre with its objective of making real the invisible world of spirits, also functioned as a didactic tool like the Aristotelian purgative tragedy.

As Ngugi observed, the proselytising zeal of the missionaries led them to label such African traditions like Igbo Masquerade theatre as “works of the devil”.³¹⁸ They established their own theatre “directed at humanizing the myths of Christian religion to make them accessible to potential African converts and to the already converted”.³¹⁹ The colonial government for its own part saw to the flourishing of western dramatic forms which consisted of “school drama, mission drama and performances designed as imperial propaganda”.³²⁰ However, indigenous artists created performances (like the Yoruba Travelling Theatre) to counter the colonial theatre. Among the Igbo, Ukaegbu observes that the Igbo masking theatre resisted Western cultural imperialism. Among the many reasons he gave for the survival of the masking theatre, Ukaegbu concluded

³¹⁶ Ukaegbu, V, *The Use of Masks in Igbo Theatre in Nigeria*, Ibid, p.62

³¹⁷ Harding, F (Ed) [Introduction], *The Performance Arts in Africa: A Reader*, London, Routledge, 2002, p.2

³¹⁸ Ngugi, T, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Ibid, p.37

³¹⁹ Loc. Cit

³²⁰ Loc. Cit

that “Christianity and colonialism did not understand the theatre enough to destroy it”.³²¹

Even though the masking theatre survived the attacks of the missionaries and colonialists and seemed unscathed in the post-independence era, what cannot be denied is that the colonial theatre produced a long term deracinating effect on indigenous theatre. Today, though a few areas, like Umunneoha in Imo State, with strong masquerading traditions have retained this theatre and its ritual dimension, it is possible to go through the length and breadth of whole towns and villages in Igbo land without finding any trace of a face mask. That was my experience as we prepared to stage the adaptation. There were no mask heads or face masks in the Arts Council and we could not think of anywhere around Owerri to hire one. It was at Orodo, about twelve miles from Owerri that we got the mask heads that we used for the full masquerade outfit and I had to pay a visual artist to sculpt the face masks used by the maskers.

Not only have forms of pre-colonial theatre been affected and suppressed, they have been gradually annihilated in many places due to the influence of Western dramatic forms. Attempts at re-inventing the masquerade theatre produce pure entertainment and at other times, a syncretic and hybrid practice like my adaptation, *Kindgom of the Mask*. It is unfortunate that Western dramatic forms require a lot of technology and expertise in the staging, directing and scripting of plays and are prone to be assessed using Western dramatic and theatrical parameters, including symbols and signs which should be culturally exclusive. For this reason, Western oriented or literary dramatic activities are very rare while at the same time suppressing the traditional theatrical forms. This leaves us with a great vacuum which I think could be addressed with adaptations such as mine. As we have already seen in Chapters Three and Four, my adaptation of *A Man of the People* brought in elements from pre-colonial Igbo theatre – mask, dance, songs, games – to work together with literary drama to open up the thematic concerns of the novel.

Considering the hypothesis that stage drama has such long term effects on society, I am confident that it is the best means of telling our people their stories and empowering

³²¹ Ukaegbu, V, *The Use of Masks in Igbo Theatre in Nigeria*, Ibid, p.25

them to be active participants in the process of self-redefinition and reclamation of their history. The novel, I would argue, is a big treasure with the cultural and historical details it is able to hold for a people but it encourages individual reading and as such, it keeps the majority of the people out as passive spectators in this whole struggle for self-redefinition. The Igbo by nature do not like to be passive spectators. They want to get involved or at the least, fully understand what the struggle is all about, otherwise, you are on your own. That is why Achebe writes for the restoration of community supremacy over individualism which I think is best transmitted through communally-oriented art forms. In the process of this research, the primacy of the community has stood out as an important aspect of Achebe's writing. It had to be so because the system he criticizes is that system that gave individuals more power than the community; it is the system that destroyed the great values of the community. In view of this, I want to conclude by sharing what I have learnt adapting this novel.

From reading all of Achebe's novels and a wide range of his critical essays, I realised that my responsibility as an adaptor of an Igbo novel is to create a sense of community among the people. The retelling of the people's stories is the first step towards achieving this, for in doing so, the adaptor helps the community to retrieve those values and elements that empowered them as a people. It becomes necessary, therefore, that the adaptations must be culturally recognisable to the people. This involves the inclusion of traditional theatrical elements, props, costumes and scenery the people can identify with. It also involves writing in the language that the people can understand. For performances that take place in the urban areas and school environments where we presume that everyone understands the English language, I felt that care still had to be taken in the use of vocabulary. The example of Achebe's writings, the simplicity of his vocabulary but embellished with traditional idioms, proverbs and stories, struck me as the example I had to emulate as an adaptor of Igbo novel, making sure that everyone who understands English (and Igbo) is not lost. That caused me to think that if I have the village audience for my target, then there is need to use vernacular Igbo, to stage the drama. This is where, as an adaptor, I would like to achieve – using Igbo language to adapt the novels, which I think would psychologically boost the people's zeal to claim the stories as theirs. I would argue that it should be an obligatory feeling for all the educated in various fields, as Omotoso argues, to domesticate knowledge through language translations. According to Omotoso,

This is the way in which the African can begin to make genuine contributions to world knowledge and ideas. This domestication can only take place when African languages are the medium of encounter between student and the known world. Indeed, this is the only means by which the knowledge contained in his language and the knowledge brought by the European languages of colonial experience can co-mingle and cross-fertilise one another.³²²

Even though languages of the colonial masters have been made the lingua franca of the post-colonial nation states, I still believe that intellectuals from every ethnic nationality should feel obliged to take part in the process of indigenizing education and knowledge. This is why this research is focused on Igbo and not Nigerian novels, hoping that the Igbo language would eventually be used in adapting the novels.

With my understanding that Achebe and some other Igbo novelists lean towards the promotion of community life, I reasoned that the staging of these adaptations should take place in an environment or arena that is a symbol of the community's togetherness. In most Igbo villages today, the schools, the churches, market and village squares evoke this sense of community and should be explored. This is not easy to determine in urban areas except if the government is well organised to map out urban centres and create awareness among the inhabitants of the urban towns. A government such as Nigeria's, which Igbo governors are part of, that has thrived on divide and rule tactics is unlikely to allow such centres to develop for fear of generating a communal spirit which is hard to break in the wake of communal resistance against bad governance. In Owerri urban, for instance, the government has totally abandoned the performance arena (an amphitheatre) half-built for more than two decades inside the State Council for Arts and Culture.

However, an amphitheatre like the abandoned one in Owerri is the type of performance space which I would prefer for the dramatization of Igbo novels that promote communal spirit. This is because the architectural design is meant to accommodate a large cast, which this experience has shown me that an adaptor of Igbo novels should always make allowances for. It is understandable that a producer's concern is mainly financial or economic interest for which they would always want to see the cast cut to

³²² Omotoso, K, "Concepts of History and Theatre in Africa", in Banham, M (ed), *A History of Theatre in Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge Uni Press, 2004, p.6

the minimum. This is why the government and big companies are to be involved in the sponsorship of the adaptations of the novels. Sponsorship is required to enable a performance to be sustained over a reasonable period of time and to travel around with it.

Certain that finance is going to pose a lot of problems to this venture, I am thinking of paying attention to the models set by Boal in Forum Theatre (Theatre of the Oppressed) and Theatre for Development to get local people involved and return to open air performances where necessary. Pickering observes that in this way, Boal believes that “theatre can act as a form of empowerment and as an agent for personal and political change, and the process involved demands that spectators are transformed into *spect-actors*.”³²³ To achieve this, having a devoted group that takes performance to the people regularly would be essential, for it is among the people, as Ngugi has observed, that the real language of African Theatre could be found – “the peasantry in particular – in their life, history and struggles.”³²⁴ To help this group engage with the local audience there may be the need to consider the contextualization of “both performance and discussion by a programme of festivity”³²⁵ as observed by Susan Bennett.

Knowing that dependence on the government will halt the move to educate the people through theatre, success will depend heavily on the intellectuals who have to make all necessary sacrifices like those my director and his fellow lecturers made to achieve the production of my adaptation. I would argue that the example of Ngugi wa Thiong’o and his fellow intellectuals who formed the Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre is what our intellectuals should aim at emulating. Government or no government, company or no company, to save the situation, this research has taught me that it is in the hands of intellectuals to speak out, to work together and support the performance of written drama that educates the masses and challenges the status quo.

My attraction to theatre as a tool to be used in spreading the novels’ message is due to my conviction that drama possesses both long and short term effects on the community. Sometimes, some might conclude that people go away from stage performances and

³²³ Pickering, K, *Key Concepts in Drama and Performance*, Ibid, p.143

³²⁴ Ngugi, T, *Decolonising the Mind*, Ibid, p. 41

³²⁵ Bennett, S, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (2nd ed), London, Routledge, 1997, p.164

leave the lessons behind, especially when one expects immediate reactions from the audience but gets nothing. Even though, as Kershaw has observed, the long term effects which performances have on the audience are difficult to determine³²⁶, the truth, I would like to argue, is that the long term effects are there in one way or another as shown by the examples of *Martyred for True Love* which has changed the perception of Valentine's Day celebration among a good number of youths in Owerri, and *Laments, Hopes and Carols* which contributed to the fall of OBT (419) gang in 1996 in Owerri. It is also not surprising that after performing *A Man of the People (Kingdom of the Mask)* at Alvan Ikoku College of Education in 2007, the College will begin a Theatre Department from the 2009/2010 academic year as it expects to be upgraded to a Federal University of Education in the same academic year. A theatre department in this institution and prospectively, a good theatre building would, I hope, encourage more adaptations.

With such practice on a more regular basis, more students and the local population would eventually become more aware of and more interested in the novel stories. The example of the secretary to the stage production of my adaptation, Miss Ruth Opara, is worth mentioning here. Prior to the adaptation of *A Man of the People*, she could not boast of reading any novel but within two years of the production she could count a number of novels she has read, including *A Man of the People*, *No Longer at Ease*, *Things Fall Apart*, *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, *People of the City* by Ekwensi, *Weep not Child* by Ngugi wa Thiongo, *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* both by Chimamanda Adichie. There is every reason to believe that there are others like her out there, actors and members of the audience, whose interest in reading the novels was awakened by the adaptation. Change is the ambition of theatre; it changes people's mentality and attitude towards life. From my observation so far, there is every indication that if the adaptation of novels continues on a more regular basis, it would be the most effective means of literary campaign among the Igbo because the novel stories would have been transmitted to the public through an efficacious means of communication and storytelling: stage drama.

³²⁶ Kershaw, B, Loc. Cit.

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Appendix

Prologue

Choreographed dance with masks.

Song probes our knowledge of other people.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A Street in Bori. Early Morning.

Car horns are blowing; headlights are flashing; people are moving across in opposite directions; hawkers call out for buyers. A hawker mounts centre stage with a bell, which he uses to attract people to himself. He rings it intermittently as he advertises his trade.

HAWKER: *(rings his bell stylishly and then puts down his basket)* Buy your homemade coffee here! Buy your homemade stuff here! Gov'ment don talk am say..., no drink foreign coffee. If you drink oyibo coffee, *achara* (grass) go grow for your head o! Because...you be sabo! Sabo! Sabo! You be sabo! If you drink oyibo coffee, you are doctor fiiiiii your mother! You go die o! Die o! Die o! You go die o! *(rings the bell continuously)* Homemade stuff! Homemade stuff! *(Lifts his basket on his head and goes off shouting and ringing the bell)* Home made stuff...!

(As the Hawkers voice re-echoes from back stage and fades, the lights fade out on stage and fade in again).

Act 1: Scene 2

Chief Nanga's Living Room.

The house is bright. Nanga's picture and other family pictures are hanging on the wall. On the corner, there is a staircase leading to Chief Nanga's room. Chief Nanga enters carrying a briefcase. Dogo is arranging the furniture.

CHIEF NANGA: Dogo!

DOGO: Sah!

CHIEF: *(looking at his watch)* Abi, Odili and driver never return?

DOGO: I never see them sir.

CHIEF NANGA: Make them no make me go late for this thing o. *(As Dogo turns to go, Odili walks in with Elsie).* Oh good, they are here.

Enter Odili and Elsie.

ODILI: Sorry, Honourable, there was too much traffic.

CHIEF NANGA: Thank God you are back just on time.

DOGO: (*focuses on Elsie*) Una welcome!

ODILI: Chief, this is Elsie I told you about. My friend from the university days.

CHIEF NANGA: Elsie, I have heard so much about you. How are you?

ELSIE: (*With bended knee*) Fine, sir!

CHIEF NANGA: Please sit down.. I hear you're a nurse at the General Hospital?

ELSIE: Yes, sir.

ODILI: (*to Elsie*) My dear Elsie, Chief Nanga, the Honourable Minister of Culture, needs no introduction.

ELSIE: Of course, not. He's admired by many.

CHIEF NANGA: (*laughs widely*). I hope that's a compliment. (*to Elsie*) Odili was my best pupil when I taught them in Standard Three. I used to call him 'Odili the Great'. We re-united when I visited my village grammar school where he is teaching, and I invited him to Bori so that we can see how to help him do even better.

ELSIE: Very kind of you, sir.

CHIEF NANGA: No, no, no...Odili is my boy: his welfare concerns me too. When he asked if you could come and spend the weekend with us, I said, why not?

ELSIE: Thank you, sir.

NANGA: Odii, why don't you arrange a quick drink?

ODILI: (*going for the brandy*) Chief is a very busy man. He rarely has time to eat or to look after his family.

CHIEF NANGA: If somebody wan make you minister, make you run; make you no 'gree. This no be good life.

ELSIE: Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown.

CHIEF NANGA: Na true word my sister.

ODILI: (*offering the drinks*) Chief is going to open a book exhibition in the next (*glances at his watch*) thirty minutes. So we are going there once you drop your bag.

ELSIE: Book Exhibition? How them dey do that one?

CHIEF NANGA: Make you ask them o, my sister. All I hear be say Minister of Culture suppose dey there. I no fit say no. Minister na public football; wherever they kick you, you go land there, *gbozaa* (*demonstrates the landing causing Odili and Elsie to laugh*). Wey the girl you say you go bring for me now. Two be pair, But three... ah. The equation no balance o o.

ODILI: Chief, I am sorry; Elsie's friend caught ill, and couldn't come with us.

ELSIE: She is admitted.

CHIEF NANGA: Oh, I'm sorry! Man proposes, God disposes. Sometimes you wonder why we plan for anything, eh Odili?

ODILI: Well, things are not always what they seem. She looked so healthy only two days ago.

CHIEF NANGA: (*looks at his watch*) We should be going. (*gives a card to Odili*) That's the IV. (*Calls. He enters*). Dogo, show her my wife's room. (*Pats Elsie on the*

shoulder with a suggestive smile) The woman of the house is on holiday with the children. So, you can take her place, ha ha ha....

(Odili stares at him as Dogo takes Elsie's bag from her and leads her out).

CHIEF NANGA: *(Lowers his voice)* This Elsie, who is she? Your future wife or ...something...?

ODILI: No... just a friend.

CHIEF NANGA: Oh, I see.

ODILI: Shouldn't she be staying in my room?

CHIEF NANGA: *(shakes his head)* Better in my wife's room. Don't want tongues wagging, if you know what I mean. *(Re-enter Elsie)*. Are you ready?

ELSIE: Well...

CHIEF NANGA: You didn't do your painting and all the *orishi-rishi*...woman ritual...you know what I mean? *(They all laugh)*. Na special ceremony o: book exhibition!

ELSIE: I was thinking. Since Jane couldn't come, why should I bother. It won't match *(laughs)*.

ODILI: Ah! Won't you like to meet Jalio? *(Taps the card)*. He's President of the Association organising the book launch.

ELSIE: Jalio? That dresses in a funny manner?

CHIEF NANGA: Funny, how? I hope he's not irresponsible.

ODILI: Not 'irresponsible'. Just well...*(gropes for the word)* strange. Some creative people are like that. Looks can be deceptive, though. He is a good guy. He is the author of *Song of the Blackbird*.

CHIEF NANGA: Oh! A mad musician!

ELSIE: *(laughs)* He's not a musician. *Song of a Blackbird* is a novel. Very popular, Chief.

CHIEF NANGA: Musician oo... novel writer oo... Can't stand irresponsible dressing.

ELSIE: *(to Odili)* You go along with Chief. I'll read a novel and wait

CHIEF NANGA: Okay. Anything to please a woman. *(checks his briefcase)* My speech: where is it? *(Odili opens a file on the table and gives it to him)*. I must rehearse.

ODILI: But we may be late. You never know.

CHIEF NANGA: No be Africa we dey? The people go wait until Minister come, otherwise their launching no go shine. *(reflects)* Abi you say this Jalio man dresses funny. Like how?

ELSIE: *Jagrajagra*. You know...

CHIEF NANGA: Okay. I go teach am lesson.

(They leave, with Odili carrying Chief Nanga's bag. Nanga stops and smiles at Elsie suggestively. She smiles back coyly and sinks into a chair.) **Blackout**

A STREET WITH MASKED PEOPLE. SOME

REMOVE THEIR MASKS TO REVEAL ANOTHER, ETC.

Act 1: Scene 3

Bori: Chief Nanga's Sitting Room; Evening.

ODILI: That was a beautiful speech you gave today.

CHIEF NANGA: When an old woman hears the dance she knows, her old age deserts her.

They all laugh. Odili is sitting with Elsie, holding her possessively, but throughout the scene, she exchanges looks with Nanga.

ODILI: But you gave Jalio a tough time. Writers and artists sometimes behave funny. Can't always predict them. They are led by their imaginations.

ELSIE: What happened?

NANGA: Oya, make we show Elsie how I yeye that Jalio man. Odili, na you be Jalio. *(Odili quickly modifies his clothes to look queer)*

CHIEF NANGA: *(Inspects Odili/Jalio).* What is the name of this your attire? Is this what you call national dress in your place?

ODILI/JALIO: I just dress to please myself.

CHIEF NANGA: Let me tell you, if you want me to attend your functions, you must learn to dress properly. You either wear a suit or if you don't like it, you can wear our national costume. That is correct protocol. If other ministers see this, they would think I am planning a coup with some rascal. *(softens his voice)*. Maybe you're pretending to be a rascal. You know people always have two faces, or even more. *(laughs)* But as a leader of tomorrow, you must show respect to leaders of today.

ODILI/JALIO: *(nods in embarrassment, then claps his hands to get the attention of the guests).* Ladies and gentlemen, the Minister for Culture, Chief the Honorable M. A. Nanga *(applause as Jalio takes him to the high table. Chief Nanga sits down)*. Your honour, on behalf of the Writers Association of Nigeria, I welcome you to this important event which showcases the great talents in this country. Your presence at this occasion affirms your commitment to arts and culture in our land. That is why many refer to you as the people's minister. Your achievements are not only recognised here but also abroad. The United States of America will be honouring you with a Doctorate Degree in a few weeks time as a testimony to your hard work. We say congratulations *(applause)*. It is our delight to have you in our midst today. We hope you find this book exhibition, a great pleasure. Thank you. *(Applause)* Ladies and gents, His Honour, Chief the Honourable M A Nanga, the Minister for Culture. *(Applause as Chief Nanga stands proudly to make his speech).*

CHIEF NANGA: *(pulls up the overflowing sleeves of his caftan to his shoulders).* I thank Mr Jalio. As you know, he is the President of this Society, which has done much to project the African personality. *(begins to read from his script)* I wish to make it known that the government is not leaving any stone unturned to make sure that this nation produces great writers like William Shakespeare and Michael West...ehm, Longman, Shortman, etc, etc. We will continue to promote arts and culture so that everybody in this country will learn how to be cultured. Thank you very much and God bless our country. *(Applause)*

ELSIE: That was great Chief the Honourable.

NANGA: If you think so, then I deserve an embrace. (*opens his arms wide. Elsie hugs him. Odili stares at them*).

ODILI: Elsie, I think we should go in now. (*pointedly*) The Chief is working on his files.

ELSIE: I'm not sleepy yet.

CHIEF NANGA: Good. In that case why don't you help me with these... (*points at some files*).

ELSIE: Okay. Go on Odii. I'll join you later.

ODILI: Good night, Chief.

NANGA: Sweet dreams.

Nanga pretends to be reading the papers in his file. Then goes to Elsie and holds her. She does not resist as they get intimate. Odili steps to the doorway and stares at them.

Blackout.

Act 1: Scene 4

A street in Bori: Early Morning.

HAWKER: (*rings bell*) Saturday coffee! Our Homemade! No be Homemade Stuff dey burn your belly! Na foreign Nest-kaa-fee dey burn your belly! Foreign Nest-kaa-fee no dey make your belly strong like African belly. Minister belly burn, because him dey drink foreign Nest-kaa-fee! Cook belly no burn because him dey drink homemade! (*Rings his bell continuously in the air shouting*) Victory to homemade! Victory to homemade! Saturday Homemade go make you strong *kakaraka*...for your home work!

(People are buying from him. Max buys and Odili, passing, spots him. They greet and Odili drags him to a corner bar, away from the street).

MAX: What were you doing with that Chief Nanga?

ODILI: The man offered to help me with government PG scholarship. So I came to Bori. Elsie – you might know her, from Uni- came to spend a night with me in the house. Before I knew what was happening, the Honourable Minister was already on top of her.

MAX: Old news. Won't surprise anyone in this city. If you put *juju* on a woman it will catch that old rotter.

ODILI: You need to hear his excuses: (*mimes*) "But Odili, you said she was just a casual friend; Besides she didn't resist". I could have strangled the two-faced idiot.

MAX: Really. You should have tackled him.

ODILI: Trust me. I told him off.

MAX: You did?

ODILI: Of course I did.

MAX: I know what you can do. Diligent! Diligent!

ODILI: But the man wasn't moved. Instead, he yelled at me: "Look my friend, don't insult me because of common woman. If you want, I can bring you a dozen of them this instant..."

MAX: Mm! Minister of culture! What a curse on all of us! That's all they care for. That's all they can talk to you about – women, cars, landed property. They use their positions and ill-gotten wealth to trap the poor girls. Anyway, what else can you expect when intelligent people leave politics to illiterates like Chief Nanga. *(Pause)* Did you get the scholarship?

ODILI: No. We went to see the Minister of Education, Chief Koko, but he was ill from a locally-made coffee he had drunk that morning. He felt that the cook had poisoned his coffee but the cook came and drank the whole cup and nothing happened to him.

MAX: So?

ODILI: The Minister's imported coffee had suddenly finished and the cook just ran out and bought the Our Home Made Stuff and prepared it for his master. The master drank and his intestines twined. The issue of scholarship wasn't even mentioned because of the incident.

MAX: *Na waoh!* So, these people tell us one thing and they do another? Listen, Odili, we are forming a new political party to address the ills in this society – Common People's Convention, CPC. I think you should get involved.

ODILI: Who are the key members?

MAX: My girl, Eunice is a member. She'll join us here with some other members. Mainly professionals. *(Odili nods thoughtfully)* It's good you didn't get the scholarship from them otherwise Nanga would have become your political god-father, a practice that has bewitched this country. Chief Nanga would have killed your voice and the country would have lost one of its bright futures. The common people need you; they need me. We must fight for them, for the voiceless.

ODILI: How possible is this mission? The poor will not listen to you if you are not in power.

MAX: That is the assumption that provides a safe zone for the selfish and the wicked to operate in the name of leadership. Come on, Odili, how can an intelligent and honest man like you stand and stare while a criminal like Nanga keeps deceiving your people?

ODILI: Because the people do not like those who tell them the truth. They prefer the masquerades.

MAX: Not all the people, Odili. Most people are waiting to see if there are dynamic, young and fearless individuals like you and I to lead them against these evil men.

ODILI: *(reflecting)* People are so gullible. Max, the people. If you saw the way they were dancing and singing, extolling him in their songs, the day he visited his town, Anata, you would know how difficult the task you are about to take.

MAX: People were ignorant of the true position. Information is key to social change.

ODILI: I agree. But if I go back now and pitch against Nanga as we are from the same constituency, how do you think the people would receive this? Moreover, my father is the local chairman for the party.

MAX: I know you dislike the man so much for his crooked politics. So, why did you come to accept his invitation?

ODILI: Well, I had already planned to come to Bori this Christmas holidays to see Elsie. Again, I deserve a government scholarship which will help me to improve my status.

Enter Eunice.

MAX: *(points at Eunice)* Hi, darling.

EUNICE: Hello, gentlemen! *(hugs Max)*

MAX: Odili, this is Eunice, my fiancée and a foundation member of CPC. We met at the Law School. Eunice, this is Odili Samalu. We have been very good friends from the university. He doesn't compromise with thoroughness. We called him "Diligent" in the campus.

ODILI: And he was known as 'Cool Max': always played it cool.

EUNICE: *(shakes Odili)* Happy to meet you.

MAX: I have been talking to Odili about our new party. We need people like him.

ODILI: I don't understand. You said this party is for the common people but it seems to be loaded with professionals only.

EUNICE: That is not entirely accurate, Odili. We are at the formation stage and these professionals are the vanguard. Once every thing is ready, everybody else will join.

MAX: The ordinary people are critical in our plans. Great revolutions were initiated by intellectuals, not the common people themselves. The people are like reeds beside the road: they only bend to the wind.

EUNICE: The question is: how can we rid our polity of corruption? How can we rid our country of corrupt leadership?

MAX: *(standing)* So, Odili. Why don't you join us at the meeting today and make up your mind about our party, CPC?

ODILI: Okay...(spreads his hands to agree).

Blackout as they leave.

STREET SCENE OF MASKS

ACT TWO

Scene 1

Nanga's village home.

Mrs Nanga is reclining on a sofa in the house. There is a knock on the door.

MRS NANGA: Who? Onye?

ODILI: *(enters)* It's me, Odili. How are you, Mrs Nanga.

MRS NANGA: Ah ah! *(Hurries to the door and opens.)* You are back already, everything alright?

ODILI: No problem, Mrs Nanga. My holiday plans changed and I had to come back.

MRS NANGA: Which one be that kwa?

ODILI: Nothing really, only there were some issues that arose in the school which I needed to sort out, especially with students' results and all that.

MRS NANGA: Oh, *oru oyibo!* (*White man's job!*) (*Calls out to her child*) Eddy! Eddy!

EDDY: Ma!

MRS NANGA: You should come and greet uncle Odili. The others went to their maternal home.

EDDY: (*enters*) Good afternoon, Sir.

ODILI: Eddy, my girl. How are you?

EDDY: Fine.

MRS NANGA: Edwina. Go and bring drink for Uncle Odili. (*To Odili*) Let us bring you a bottle of beer. (*urging*) It is cold.

ODILI: Okay, ma.

(*Eddy leaves*)

ODILI: When are you preparing to go back to Bori? The house there is so quiet without you and the children.

MRS NANGA: Don't tell me about Bori now, let me get some rest here. Anyway, Papa Eddy said I should come back by the end of next month before he goes to America but... I don't know...

ODILI: I thought you were going with him.

MRS NANGA: Me, Mrs Nanga, bush woman? (*laughs*)

ODILI: Why not? Who said you are a bush woman?

MRS NANGA: My brother, who dash monkey banana? They never see those standing na we wey sit for ground them go see? I think you be teacher, teach me ABC so I go follow him go America.

ODILI: Don't be saying this ma.

MRS NANGA: When Edna comes, she will go to those places. White man's land is not for bush, old woman like me.

(*Eddy brings the drink and leaves*)

ODILI: Who is Edna?

MRS NANGA: Our new wife. The one the Chief is showing off. As if you don't know.

ODILI: Oh, that girl. Nonsense. She doesn't know half as much book as you know.

MRS NANGA: Ah, she does o. I no go modern school. (*gives him the opener*)

ODILI: Thank you. But everybody knows that standard six in your time was superior to Senior Cambridge today.

MRS NANGA: You talk as though I went to school in nineteen-*kridim*.

ODILI: No, no no. I don't mean that. I mean that education has been falling every year. Last year's standard six is higher than this year's.

MRS NANGA: If it was not for marriage, I would have been educated. I passed my entrance to Secondary School but papa Eddy's father and his people did not give me an inch so that I will marry their son. They are doing the same thing to that young girl,

Edna, and she is falling into their trap. They pretend it is for her own good. Let her come quick-quick to enjoy Chief Nanga's money before it runs away (*she laughs bitterly*).

ODILI: Is she coming into the house soon?

MRS NANGA: I don't know. What is my own there? Let her come tomorrow, I don't care; the house is there for her to take over from me – stay awake at night, talk grammar and in the morning her dress will be smelling cigarette and white people.

ODILI: (*Laughs loudly*). You can kill somebody with laughter. Why don't you advise her? She is only a little girl.

MRS NANGA: Little girl, eh? She was born yesterday. Okay, let her come and suck (*puts her right arm under her left breast and the left arm underneath across, miming a mother breastfeeding a baby*). Was I half her age when I got married to papa Eddy? Let her come and eat Nanga's wealth: everything is ready. Let no one remember that I married him when he was nothing and we worked together to make him something. This is my reward. Nonsense. .

ODILI: (*In a low tone that shows compassion*). Do you want me to talk to her?

MRS NANGA: If you want, you can talk to her. But don't tell anyone I sent you.

ODILI: How do I see her?

MRS NANGA: Her village is Umueke. Once you get there, people will show you the way. Papa Eddy has made them popular. She will even be here for Christmas to help me serve the guests.

ODILI: That's better. Thank you madam, I must be going. I'll be here on Christmas day.

MRS NANGA: Thank you for coming. Go well.

Blackout as Odili leaves.

Act 2: Scene 2

Street on Christmas Day.

Below the stage, before the audience, masquerades are dancing. One of the masquerades recites Igbo proverbs and idioms and then intones a song.

Mmanwu ee eh

Mmanwu ee eh

Mmanwu ee eh

Onye obula kpunu mmanwu!

Mmanwu ee eh

Mmanwu ee eh

Mmanwu ee eh

Uwa anyi a bunu mmanwu!

(*Meaning: Masquerade, masquerade, masquerade: every body is wearing mask! Masquerade, masquerade, masquerade: This our world is a masquerade!*)

Odili is wearing a mask and walks into the masquerades. After singing this chorus a couple of times, Odili leaves them, enters Nanga's premises and removes his mask. He puts it into a bag.

DRUNKARD (*coming out from Nanga's house, holding a bottle of beer on his way out, walks up to Odili*) You be VIP like my brother Chief Nanga, or you be PIV, Poor Innocent Victim like me? Mh? (*Odili smiles while the drunkard staggers away*). Idiot of no answer!

Act 2: Scene 3

Nanga's parlour is alive with Christmas decorations. Odili enters and is welcomed by Mrs Nanga who takes him to a veranda table, speaks quietly to him and leaves. Mrs Nanga returns with Edna.

MRS NANGA: Mh, Edna! This is Papa Eddy's friend. He is our special Christmas visitor, so I would like you, and not these children who don't know their left from their right, to serve him.

EDNA: Good afternoon, Mr Samalu.

ODILI: (*stands*) Ah, Edna, good afternoon (*they shake hands*).

MRS NANGA: You already know yourselves?

ODILI: The day Chief visited our school, right? (*His gesture forces Edna to agree*).

EDNA: (*half-heartedly*) Yes.

MRS NANGA: Hm! (*leans backwards*) You young people, *unu dikwa egwu*, you are wonderful o. Anyway, since you know yourselves, I leave you both. Take care of him, oh, *nne*? (*She leaves them goes but stops half way and gives Odili signs to talk to her very well*).

EDNA: Okay, what do you want me to bring for you?

ODILI: Just a drink will be fine.

EDNA: Is that all; what of rice?

ODILI: No, I ate before coming.

EDNA: What drink then, beer or mineral?

ODILI: Beer.

EDNA: And some meat?

ODILI: Okay.

(Edna leaves. The masquerade music wells up and Odili joins in the song. Edna returns with a drink and meat. After serving Odili, she leans on a rail looking out).

ODILI: Edna, why don't you sit down?

EDNA: I'm alright here, I want to see what's going on along the road.

ODILI: Is anything going on?

EDNA: Oh, masquerades and people in their Christmas best. How did you pass through the masquerades? They do not allow strangers to cross.

ODILI: Well, you need a mask to get through strange masquerades. I had to put on a mask.

EDNA: A mask? *(Turns sharply). (Odili brings out a mask head from his bag and shows her).*

ODILI: Strange situations can force a mask on you.

EDNA: What do you mean?

ODILI: Never mind.

EDNA: Can I try it on?

ODILI: Why not? Try it. Mask on mask; on your beautiful face, yes! *(laughs).*

EDNA: That's not funny! Let me see.

ODILI: *(Odili puts the mask on his face and makes faces at her; tries to put it on Edna's face. She avoids it and turns back to the rail laughing).* Any body can put on a mask but for different reasons.

EDNA: It makes people look ugly.

ODILI: No! Just different.

EDNA: *(giggles sarcastically)* You are very funny, Mr. Samalu.

ODILI: *(sits down and pauses for a while).* Edna, I have something to tell you.

EDNA: Me?

ODILI: Yes, come and sit down. *(Edna comes and sits down).* Edna, I don't know how you will take this. I just looked at you and thought I should give you this little piece of advice. I have seen the world more than you have and I consider myself your friend. *(He takes another sip).* You will be making great mistake to allow yourself to be rushed into marriage now. You are too young for that, what more, marrying a polygamist.

EDNA: *(Snapping)* Is that what Mama asked you to tell me?

ODILI: Who is Mama? Oh, Mrs Nanga, I see. Why? Why should she ask me to tell you such a thing? No, Edna, it is in your own interest. You can't go and spoil your life like that.

EDNA: What is your business in it?

ODILI: None whatsoever. Except that I think a beautiful young girl like you deserves better than to marry a polygamist; far ahead of you in years.

EDNA: Well, that is the world of women.

ODILI: Rubbish! How can an educated girl say a thing like that?

EDNA: *(Gets up and walks back to the rail).* He paid for me to go to the college.

ODILI: So what? *(Bends his head in regret. Then, gets up and goes to Edna putting his arm round her waist. Edna swings round sharply in rejection. They stand apart, looking at each other. Edna's eyes fall and she turns away and leans on the rail again. Odili goes back to his seat. Silence).* I ask your pardon, Edna! Do not misunderstand me. You are right that all this is none of my business really. Please, forget everything I said. *(Silence).*

EDNA: I am sorry, Odili. *(She goes and takes her seat and places her hand on that of Odili)* Have I offended you? *(She rolls her eyes)*

ODILI: *(Places his other hand on top of hers)* How can you offend me? *(They stare at each other).*

EDNA: (*sober*) So, what do you think I should do?

ODILI: Just give yourself a chance. That's all...that's all am saying.

EDNA: (*nods, takes a deep breathe, and mumbles*) Okay. (*pause*) But I thought he is your friend.

ODILI: Even if he Chief Nanga is my father or brother. (*pause*) I know you can do better than most girls out there but it's like nobody has made you to realise that you have great potentials.

(*Edna bends her head down, supported by her hands. Shortly, tears begin to drop from her eyes. Odili puts down his cup and tries to stop her from crying*). Edna, don't please. (*Odili offers her his handkerchief. Edna collects it slowly but does not use it. She keeps sobbing. They hear Mrs Nanga's steps. Edna quickly wipes her tears but Mrs Nanga notices*).

MRS NANGA: (*as she walks towards them*) Edna, is our guest alright?

EDNA: (*without turning*) Yes, ma.

MRS NANGA: (*touches Edna on the shoulder with scrutiny*) Ah ah! (*looks at Odili*), Odili what is wrong?

EDNA: I am alright.

ODILI: She touched her eyes with pepper in her hands. She didn't know there was pepper on the dry meat and didn't wash her hands after serving me some.

MRS NANGA: Oh (*laughs hysterically*), you didn't know? Go and wash your hands, then? (*Edna leaves. Mrs Nanga watches and sucks the air*). She does not know there is pepper on the meat. Ah! This is still morning. She hasn't seen anything yet. (*hysterical laughter*). Odili watches her a while and then starts laughing too.)

Blackout.

THE STREET MASQUERADE SEQUENCE

ACT THREE:

Scene 1

Odili's village house.

Odili is reading Edna's letter.

EDNA'S VOICE: (*reading aloud*) Dear Odili, your missive of 10th instant was received and its contents well noted. I cannot adequately express my deep sense of gratitude for your brotherly pieces of advice. It is just a pity that you did not meet me in the house when you came last time. My brother has narrated to me how my father addressed you badly and disgraced you. I am really sorry about the whole episode and I feel like going on a bended knee to beg forgiveness. I know that you are so noble and kind hearted to forgive me before even I ask (*smiles*).

I have noted carefully all that you said about my marriage. Really, you should pity poor me, Odili. I am in a jam about the whole thing. If I develop cold feet now my father will almost kill me. Where is he going to find all the money the man has paid on

my head? So it is not so much that I want to be called a minister's wife but a matter of can't help. What cannot be avoided must be borne.

ODILI: Rubbish!

ODILI: (*reading*) What I pray for is happiness. If God says that I will be happy in any man's house I will be happy. I hope we will always be friends. For yesterday is but a dream and tomorrow is only a vision but today's friendship makes every yesterday a dream of happiness and every tomorrow a vision of hope. Good-bye and sweet dreams.

Yours very truly, Edna Odo.

PS. My brother told me you have bought a new car. Congrats and more grease to your elbows. I hope you will carry me in it one day (*smiles*).

ODILI: (*scans through the letter*) Dear Odili: I wrote her My Dearest Edna and this is all she has for me, Dear Odili. Mmm...sweet dreams...sweet dreams...okay, maybe, that one. (*Pause*)

(*Enter Boniface and colleague – Odili's thugs. Odili questions them with his look*).

BONIFACE: Oga, we need Twenty-five Thousand Naira.

ODILI: (*folds away Edna's letter away*) But I gave you Ten Thousand Naira yesterday.

BONIFACE: Are you there? If na play we dey play make you tell us because me I no wan waste my time for nothing sake. Or you think na so so talk talk you go take win Chief Nanga? If government no give you plenty money for election make you tell them no be sand sand we de take do am...

SECOND THUG: Man no fit fight tiger with empty hand.

ODILI: Boniface, no be government dey give us money. We be small party, CPC. We want help poor people like you. How government go give us money? This government no like anything wey go help poor people.

BONIFACE: But na who dey give the er...wetin call...PCP money?

ODILI: Some friends abroad.

SECOND THUG: You no fit send your friends erm...telegram?

ODILI: Let's not go into that now. What do you need Twenty-five Thousand Naira for? And what have you done with the Ten Thousand Naira?

BONIFACE: We give Three Thousand-Five to that policeman so that he go spoil the paper for our case. Then we give One Thousand-Five to Court Clerk because they say as the matter don reach him eye the policeman no kuku spoil am just like that. Then we give another Two Thousand to...

ODILI: (*interrupting*) All right. What do you want the Twenty-five Thousand Naira for?

BONIFACE: So they no tell you say Chief Nanga don return back from Bori yesterday?

ODILI: So? You wan give him money or wetin?

BONIFACE: This no be matter for joke; we wan the money to pay certain persons wey go go him house for night and burn him car.

ODILI: What?! No, we don't need to do that.

BONIFACE: Look, my frien, I don tell you say if you no wan serious for this business make you go rest for house. I don see say you wan play too much gentleman for this matter... *(leaves)*

2nd THUG: Dem tell you say na gentlemanity de give other people minister...? Anyway wetin be my concern there? Na you sabi. *(leaves)*.

(Odili goes back to Edna's letter.)

Act 3 Scene 2

Enter Mr Samalu

SAMALU: Odili. Who were those men?

ODILI: Political allies, Papa.

SAMALU: Ha! They sounded tough.

ODILI: Politics is tough. Are you not the local chairman for your party?

Enter Nanga.

SAMALU: *(With reverence)* Welcome Chief the Honorable. Welcome.

CHIEF NANGA: Thank you, my friend. How has it been?

SAMALU: Oh! Very well. Sit down, please.

CHIEF NANGA: Hello! Odili, my great enemy.

ODILI: *(Keeps his eyes on the letter and responds very casually)* Hello.

MR SAMALU: *(Surprised)* Odili! Is that how you greet the Honorable Minister?

CHIEF NANGA: Let him be, sir.

MR SAMALU: *(Moves towards Odili with rage)* Odili! Odili! Will you greet Chief the Honourable Minister properly! *(Odili ignores him but rather pockets Edna's letter, stares at his father and picks a newspaper, spreading it across his face)*. Chief the Honourable Minister, you are most welcome to my house. Please, forget this stupid boy. With more than thirty-five children in my house, their troubles put together do not measure up to one quarter of the trouble this boy gives me...right from birth, Chief, right from/

CHIEF NANGA: Please sir, don't worry about Odili.

MR SAMALU: But if he wants to put his head into a pot, then he should wait until he builds his own house not here in my own house. If he has no respect for me, he must not carry his foolishness to such an important guest.

CHIEF NANGA: No, sir. You are my political father; this is my house; so I am no guest here. Without the backing of people like you at home, we cannot achieve anything in Bori. Don't mind all these young boys saying all kinds of rubbish against me... what do they know? They break their heads because they hear that Chief Nanga has eaten ten percent commission. Do they know that all commissions are paid into party funds? That's why I ask: what do they know? *(Odili lowers his newspaper at half-mast and looks at Chief Nanga)*.

MR SAMALU: That's right!

ODILI: I suppose your new four-storey building is going to be the party headquarters (*puts down the newspaper*).

MR SAMALU: Shut your dirty mouth! Chief the honourable Minister was not talking to you.

ODILI: I don't expect him to, because he knows I know what he knows...and...

MR SAMALU: I said, shut up! Shut up your dirty mouth!

CHIEF NANGA: Leave him alone, sir. Let him finish advertising his ignorance and then I will educate him. (*Pause*). Have you finished, Mr Nationalist? He that knows not and knows not that he knows not is a fool.

MR SAMALU: Please Chief, don't mind this boy. If I had another like him, I would have died long ago.

MR SAMALU: (*blessing the kola*) Honourable. Here is kola. It brings life in abundance. When a mad man walks naked, it is his kinsmen who feel the shame. So, I beg forgiveness from the Honourable whom my son has wronged. (*to Odili*) You do not eat a man's food and call him a fool or spit in his face: that is abomination!

NANGA: Correct!

SAMALU: (*blessing the kola nuts*)

In eating this kola,

We seek progress

We seek peace

We seek prosperity.

Life of water, life of fish:

Let the water not dry

Let the fish not die.

NANGA: Isee!

(*Samalu offers the kola. He takes a bit and puts the complete one in his pocket*)

CHIEF NANGA: (*Turns squarely to Odili and holds out an envelope*) Odili, this is your scholarship. Go and learn more books. The country needs experts like you. Leave the dirty game for us who know how to play it.

ODILI: Listen, Chief Nanga...

NANGA: (*interrupts*) I don't want you to misunderstand me. Odili, I am not afraid of you. Every goat and every fowl in this country knows that you will fail woefully. You will lose your deposit and disgrace yourself. (*Brings out money*) Take. I am only giving you this money because I feel that after all my years of service to my people I deserve to be elected unopposed so that my detractors in Bori will know that I have my people solidly behind me. That is the only reason why I am giving you this money. Otherwise, I should leave you alone to learn your bitter lesson so that when you hear of election again you will run.

ODILI: I know you are a teacher of bitter lessons.

MR SAMALU: Shut up your dirty mouth!

CHIEF NANGA: I know those irresponsible boys have given you money. If you have any sense, keep the money and train your father's children with it or do something useful.... We know where that money is coming from. Don't think we don't know. We will deal with them after the election. They think they can come here and give money

to irresponsible people to overthrow a duly constituted government? We will show them. As for you my brother, you can eat what has entered your hand.... Your good friend, Maxwell Kulamo, has more sense than you. He has already taken his money and agreed to step down for Chief Koko.

ODILI: *(startled)* Impossible!

CHIEF NANGA: Look at him. He does not even know what is happening; our great politician! You stay here in the bush wasting your time and your friends are busy putting their money in the bank in Bori. Take that money and take your scholarship to go and learn more book; the country needs experts like you and....leave the dirty game of politics to us who know how to play it....Mm?

ODILI: You think everyone can be bought with money. You are making a sad mistake. I will fight you along the road and inside the bush, even if you buy the entire CPC. I can see you are trying to cover your fear. I see fear in your eyes. If you know you are not afraid why do you send thugs to molest me; why do your hired cowards carry placards with my name? I am sorry, Mr Man, you can take your filthy money and clear out of here *(walks indoors)*. Bush man!

MR SAMALU: *(screams)* Odili! *(Odili ignores him. Mr Samalu turns to Chief Nanga)*. Chief, I don't know how you are going to forgive this. I have worked hard for the party and for you in this constituency. Please...

CHIEF NANGA: *(stretches his hands on Mr Samalu's shoulders)* It is alright, sir. I perfectly understand how you feel. I am too old to allow a small boy's rashness and foolishness to destroy our relationship. I....I should be going.

(Mr Samalu breathes heavily as Chief Nanga takes his leave).

Odili returns.

SAMALU: So you really want to fight Chief Nanga! My son, why don't you fall where your pieces could be gathered? Now, you have lost the sky, you have lost the ground.

ODILI: Why do you worry yourself and get lean over a loss that is mine and not yours at all? You are in P.O.P and I am in CPC? *(in a calmer voice)* So, your party gives ministers authority to take bribes, eh?

MR SAMALU: *(startled)* What?

ODILI: Did you not hear Chief Nanga say that the ten percent he receives on contracts is for your party. Is that true?

MR SAMALU: If alligator comes out of water one morning and tells you that crocodile is sick, can you doubt his story?

ODILI: I see *(smiles with an air of victory as he watches his father go indoors. Noise outside)*.

Act 3 Scene 3

Enter CPC members, singing.

CPC MEMBERS: For we are jolly good fellows
For we are jolly good fellows
For we are jolly good fellows
And so say all of us.
And so say all of us, hurrah!

And so say all of us, hurrah!
(*any suitable songs can be used*)

MAX: CPC!

MEMBERS: New life to the people!

EUNICE: CPC!

MEMBERS: Save the poor!

ODILI: (*welcomes them*). Cool Max!

MAX: Diligent, Diligent!

ODILI: You didn't tell me you were coming today, but it doesn't matter, I am very glad to have you here today.

MAX: HIP, HIP, HIP –

ALL: Hurrah! (*Everyone sings*)

MAX: (*excited*) Why don't we launch our campaign here and now?

EUNICE: Why not indeed.

ODILI: Not here. My father is local chairman of P.O.P and we shouldn't embarrass him.

MR SAMALU: (*at the entrance*) What has my being POP chairman got to do with it? (*Chorus of "Good evening, Sir"*) Thank you. I believe that the hawk should perch and the eagle should perch, whichever says to the other 'don't perch' may its own wing break. (*goes back in*).

CPC MEMBERS: (*applaud Mr Samalu and sing more*)

(*Max takes the microphone. Some people sit on the ground some stand receiving the party's promotional flyers*).

MAX: My fellow common citizens of our country! Fellow victims of selfish rule and wicked government! What you are witnessing today is an advanced step towards the realisation of your prayers and dreams for our country: a land where everyone is comfortable; where peace is built on justice. (*applause*)

Once upon a time, a hunter killed a big-game at night. He searched for it in vain and at last, he decided to go home and await daylight. At the first light of morning he returned to the forest full of expectation. And what do you think he found?

CROWD: Tell us! Tell us!

MAX: He saw two vultures fighting over what still remained of the carcass. In great anger he loaded his gun and shot the two dirty uneatable birds. You may say that he was foolish to waste his bullet on them but I say no. He wanted to wipe out dirty thieves fighting over another man's inheritance. That hunter is you. Yes, you, the common people. And the two vultures are POP and PAP. You must stop them! (*Applause*).

EX-POLICEMAN: There were three vultures. The third and youngest was called CPC.

(*People laugh and some close to him shake his hands*).

OLD WOMAN: Why don't you leave the young man alone to tell us his story?

MAX: CPC is your togetherness to shoot the vultures devouring your inheritance. If you do not have a united front like this party, you cannot reclaim what is yours. You must be united!

The Common People's Convention, CPC, is the political truth which shall set you all free – free from the mindless gang that has hijacked our beloved country. You must not give your vote to men who have just one thing in mind – to eat and forget the people.

EX-POLICEMAN: (*raises his mind and is allowed to speak*) We know they are eating, but we are eating too. They are bringing us water and they promise to bring us electricity. We did not have those things before; that is why I say we are eating too.

YOUNG MAN: Don't mind the retired police officer. He has been eating old guinea-fowl with them. (*Everyone laughs*).

MAX: Let me tell you, that water you said they are bringing, call it abandoned project. The contractor is a free man because he has collected his ten percent. It is a typical example of what belongs to you that the vultures have devoured among themselves. I ask you: why should we be recycling old people who know nothing other than embezzlement and corruption? We have honest, young, dynamic and intelligent young men who are ready to make us savour the sweetness of this land of promise. We have come so far and yet we are still very far. After so many years under white man's colonial regime, it is unthinkable that our own people have continued to make us strangers in our own land. They have made our lives worse! (*Softens his voice*) Some people even want the white man to come back.

CROWD: (*some echo yes, some echo no*) Yes! No! No!

MAX: All you have to do is to vote for those who will deliver. Vote for CPC, your own party, and bring back smiles on your faces. Our party is made up of young professionals who can take care of themselves but are concerned about you.

EUNICE: (*begins a song and everybody joins*).

MAX: Odili your own son is a teacher. In the university, we called him Diligent because he is thorough with whatever he is doing. You cannot pray for a better representation than him. And on that note, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to present to you, your CPC House of Parliament candidate, Mr Odili Samalu!

(*Max lifts Odili's hand and Odili waves to the people. The people clap and cheer*). Your town Urua last time voted for a son of Anata, Chief Nanga. This time Anata should vote for your own son. This is what a dog said to the other: 'you fall for me, I fall for you. I greet you all! (*People cheer*).

EX-POLICEMAN: I think I should thank this young man. He has it. It is not age but knowledge that is important. As an ex-policeman, I should know. That 'it is the turn of Urua, Anata has eaten' is a very important point you made here. If the herb we are looking for in the forest grows in our very backyard, are we not fools not to save ourselves the journey? (*The crowd makes some supporting noise*). But, erm...we are like ignorant people and we are like children. I know our son knows where to go and what to say; he should tell them that we are waiting like a baby cutting first tooth: tell them that you don't see a baby's first tooth empty handed. (*Turns around to everyone*) Have I spoken well?

CROWD: Yes! (*They sing and ululate*)

EX-POLICEMAN: But let me ask: Odili, are you ready for the challenge?

ODILI: The answer is yes. To save the common people, yes. To obey the people's will, yes. That is why I am in CPC. Listen to this.

On the day I returned from Bori to Anata, the people closed Josiah's shop and they ostracised him because he stole the walking stick of a blind man to make charm so that more people will be buying from his shop. That Josiah was the first that offered to work for me when I declared my intention to contest for election. Because we are responsible people, in a responsible and people oriented party, I did not accept him. I did not accept him because I respect the will of the people and will always do. But do you know today that Josiah is Chief Nanga's henchman? This is the type of gang that Max told you we want to free you from. The choice is yours. On my part, my answer to your question is, yes, I am ready. And I want to thank you for your support, my people. CPC!

CPC MEMBERS: New life to the people!

(There is big applause from the crowd while the CPC members sing their song – For we are jolly good fellows while the crowd disperse.

Then Odili takes Max aside walking up stage talking to him in a low tone).

MAX: You should have taken the money from him.

ODILI: What?

MAX: Chief Koko offered One hundred Thousand naira and after consulting the other boys, we decided to take it. It paid for that minibus.

ODILI: I don't understand you, Max. Are you telling me that you have taken money and stepped down for POP?

MAX: Nothing of that sort, Odili. The paper I signed has no legal force whatever and we needed the money.

ODILI: It has a moral force. I am sorry, Max, but I think you have committed a big blunder. I thought we wanted our fight to be clean... You had better look out; they will be even more vicious from now on.

MAX: Oh, forget that. Do you know, Odili, that British Amalgamated has paid out one million naira to POP to fight this election? Yes, and we also know that the Americans have been even more generous, although we don't have the figures yet. Now you tell me how you plan to fight such a dirty war without soiling your hands a little. Just tell me. Anyway, we must be moving to Abaga now. I'll be here again in a couple of days to iron out everything and let you know our detailed plans from now on. Meanwhile, old boy, if the offer comes again, take it. It's as much your money as his.

ODILI: Never, Max, never! It is our people's custom that you must render the service for which you collected money. What a blunder!

MAX: Anyway, the question is purely academic now.... See you... *(Leaves).*

Blackout.

Act 3: Scene 4

MAQUERADES IN A CONFRONTATIONAL DANCE

Edna confronts Odili as the masquerades depart

EDNA: Odili! Can't you go and look for your own woman instead of sneaking around me? My father has told you to stop coming to our house or you go back to Urua a dead man. Have you come to pick up gossips for your friend, Mrs Nanga? Errand boy. Listen. I, Edna Odo, will marry Chief Nanga. I have been respecting you because of Chief Nanga but if you make the mistake of coming to our house again, I will tell you that my name is Edna Odo. *(she turns to go but turns back after two steps)* Mr Gossiper! Womanizer! Go and tell Mrs Nanga what I said, let me see if she won't break your head. You think you can challenge her husband and be her friend. See you, mask wearer... everybody has seen your face. Woooo! *(leaves as Odili stares after her)*.

Blackout

Act 3: Scene 5

The Samalu sitting room.

Mr Samalu is eating fufu. Enter Odili from outdoors

ODILI: Papa, the news all over town is that you have been removed as chairman of POP in Urua. It's been announced over the radio.

MR SAMALU: Is that all they said?

ODILI: For anti-party activities. That means, it's our campaign that cost you your position.

MR SAMALU: Their own palaver, not mine.

Enter a bailiff.

BAILIFF: Hello, Mr Samalu. I am Mr Johnson Kalio. Senior bailiff at High Court One. I have a court order for you.

ODILI: *(takes the paper from the bailiff and reads the paper.)* For organising a rally in your house without police permit, you are fined the sum of one hundred thousand naira or you go to jail for 30 days.

BAILIFF: Payment must be within 24 hours or you will be arrested and jailed.

ODILI: Okay. You have delivered your message. Leave this place *(goes indoors angrily)*.

BAILIFF: See the *nyash* you go take fight Chief Nanga. Nonsense!

MR. SAMALU: Why not go your way?

BAILIFF *(leaving)*: This na only the beginning.

Samalu finishes eating and moves to the sitting area.

Enter Councillor's Messenger.

MESSENGER: Good day, sir. I'm from the Councillor.

MR SAMALU: Good day. How is councillor?

MESSENGER: He's fine, sir. He said I should give you this *(the messenger gives him a paper which he reads aloud)*.

MR. SAMALU: Dear Mr Hezekiah Samalu, I know that these few days must have been very difficult for you and your family due to obvious reasons. I want to assure you of

my support and see that your recent tax levy is refunded to you. All you have to do, dear sir, is to sign the enclosed document, disassociating yourself from your son's lunatic activities and underscore that the so-called launching of CPC in your premises happened without your knowledge and consent. I am very sure, this will restore the confidence and the respect our great and God-fearing leader, Chief the Honourable M. A. Nanga, has for you. *(to the messenger)* If you love your life, carry your corpse away from here! *(The messenger leaves quickly as Odili enters)*

ODILI: What does he want? *(Samalu gives the letter to him. Odili reads and drops it on the table)*. You made a serious mistake.

MR SAMALU: All my life, have I never done anything good in your eyes?

ODILI: Why did you not sign this paper?

MR SAMALU: *(silent for a while)* You may be right. But our people say that a man of worth never gets up to unsay what he said yesterday.

ODILI: Men of worth nowadays simply forget what they said yesterday.

MR SAMALU: Those who do so are not men of worth no matter their economic and social status. I received your friends in my house and I am not going to deny it. *(Pause)*. But one thing I must make clear is: you brought this trouble into my compound so you should carry it. From today, whatever new tax they decide upon I will pass the paper to you.

ODILI: *(Smiling)* That is a small matter. *(Silence)*. May be, you are not the man I thought you were.

(Mr Samalu stands up, looks at Odili, who is nodding in agreement to his own statement, pats him on the shoulder and leaves indoors.)

ODILI: I'm off to the post office. *(brings out an envelope and reads the letter in it)*.

Dear Edna, I wonder who put it into your beautiful empty head that I want to take you from your precious man. What on earth do you think I would want to do with a girl who has no more education than lower Elementary? By all means marry your ancient man and if you find that he is not up to it, you can always steal away to his son's bed.

Yours truly,

Odili Samalu *(punches into the air victoriously)*.

Blackout

Act 3: Scene 6

Village Street.

Enter two village men

1ST MAN: What? Say it again? You won't vote for Nanga? Then you had better throw up his money. The money you took from him.

2ND MAN: Giving money for votes. That is bribery, in the first place.

1ST MAN: Mh...and corruption, in the second place. Why did you collect the money, in the third place? If you don't vote for him after taking his money, thunder will strike off your head. Nanga is a violent man.

2nd MAN: Who cares – violent or not violent? And he is such a lecher.

1st MAN: A man who cannot control his thing should not rule us, otherwise, our women are not safe.

2nd MAN: We should not have collected any money, even if we wanted to vote for him; that's all I am saying. I regret.

1ST MAN: Is there no palm juice in that gourd? My throat is dry.

2ND MAN: (*pouring drinks*) If we vote without collecting money, we could challenge his shortcomings in office. But with that money, our voices are drowned; our muscles deflated. No moral right to complain.

1ST MAN: Oh oh, challenge government man? (*laughs hysterically*) He has police, he has army, he even has secret boys. What do you have to challenge him with?

2ND MAN: If the people are together, even with bare hands, we can subdue them. One mind is all we need. Unity! But by collecting money, we have given them our signatures to rake up our economy. We have betrayed the future, our children.. (*shakes his head and finishes the drink*)

1ST MAN: You are a philosopher. We are like fowls, when they need us to lay eggs, they throw the feed at us...we lay eggs! (*laughs*).

2ND MAN: We can all refuse the feed and not lay those eggs for them.

1ST MAN: Then you will die of hunger.

2ND MAN: If we all die of hunger, then, they will also die, since they feed on us.

1ST MAN: They will eat your dead bodies.

2ND MAN: But before they threw feed at us, we were surviving

1ST MAN: At least they make you eat fat for once.

2ND MAN: And go back to our poor feeding. Don't you see we are fools?

1ST MAN: Fools are those who don't eat what has entered into their mouths.

2ND MAN: Well, if it comes to the worst, I'll tear my ballot paper into two: give one part to the money I have eaten and give the other part to my conscience.

1ST MAN: Conscience! In this country? Ewoo... This is good palm juice. Another one for the road.

2nd MAN: Go and get your own wine! Long throat. (*they continue on the road*).

Act 3: Scene 7

Nanga's Political Campaign.

Arena:

Stage is rowdy but is decorated with POP flags and banners. Dancers are entertaining. Enter Chief Nanga and entourage as the announcer sings his praises. They take their seat. Mrs Nanga sits on his right while Edna is on his left. Dogo is directly behind Edna while Josiah is within the crowd.

ANNOUNCER (*Two Announcers may be used*) :

Chief honourable M A Nanga!
Minister of culture of this great nation!
A man that needs no introduction.
The son of Anata, son of the soil;
Our strength in foreign land.
One man we greet in plural;
Mighty tree! The Iroko! Great Masquerade!
The great sea that never dries!

(Meanwhile Josiah goes to the table and whispers into Nanga's ear and walks away. Nanga springs up immediately searching the crowd with his eyes)

CHIEF NANGA: *(taking the microphone from the announcer)* Josiah! *(Josiah gets back and begins to point towards Odili's direction. Odili notices and begins to withdraw but Nanga alerts the crowd).* Stop that man wearing hat and dark glasses! *(Odili tries to escape)* I said, stop that thief trying to run away! *(Odili stops and turns towards Chief Nanga).* Odili the great! Ha haaaaa! Odili the great! My people, this is the boy who wants to take my seat *(the crowd roars)*. This is the boy who is thrusting his finger into my eye. He came to my house in Bori, ate my food, and drank my water and wine. Instead of saying 'thank you', he set about plotting to drive me out and take over my house. *(Crowd roars)*. I hear some asking 'who is he'? I will tell you. He was once my pupil. I taught him ABC and I called him to come to my house to arrange for him to go England and get more education. I take the blame. He didn't just come to my house – I called him. He even tried to take a girl on whose head I had put a full bride-price and many other expenses *(tries to pull Edna's hands away from covering her face)*. But my wife caught him and told me. Odili the great! So you have come to seek me out again. You are very brave; or have you come to seek Edna, eh? Take the microphone and tell my people why you have come; tell them, they are listening.

ODILI: *(takes the microphone)* I have come to tell your people that you are a liar and...*(Chief Nanga takes the mic away; slaps Odili on the face. Odili replies with a slap before Chief Nanga's thugs seize his hands behind his back giving Chief Nanga advantage over him. Edna comes between them but Chief Nanga pushes her violently to the floor. Other people join in beating Odili until he is unconscious. Police officers are seen standing and doing nothing).*

Lights go out gradually as the people move away from the stage in a chaotic manner.

Flute blows softly, close to a dirge. Then, the light returns gradually. Edna is alone on the floor in a lying position. She lifts her head gradually. From a sitting position, she looks around turning only her head in different directions. Her eyes are piercing. Then, she rises and walks away.

Blackout.

ACT FOUR

Scene 1

Election Day.

Choreographed stylized movement in dim shadows.

There are two ballot boxes on the stage. 'Vote for Chief Honourable Nanga' is written with Nanga's picture on one box while 'Vote for Mr Odili' is on the other. People file up to cast

their votes but the line is only towards Chief Nanga's box. Two police officers are watching and making sure everyone is voting for Chief Nanga. A young man pulls away from the line towards Odili's box. The police officer tries to halt him but he refuses and casts his vote into Odili's box. As he leaves, he pulls up his shirt as he walks across the police officer as a way of bragging. The police officer pulls him back. Quarrel ensues. As the young man exchanges words with the police officer, the second police officer comes, slaps the boy in the face, and pushes him away. The boy staggers; the crowd of voters are enjoying the quarrel. Unexpectedly, as the second police officer moves towards the young man, he retaliates with a slap and runs away. The two officers give him a chase. A few more people break away from the line and cast their vote into Odili's box. Chief Nanga who is coming to cast his vote meets the police officers at the exit. Chief Nanga halts them and sends them back to their posts. Chief Nanga is in the company of his wife, Mrs Nanga and two thugs. The police officers stop the voting line to make way for the Chief to cast his vote. (crowd noise).

CROWD: "Chief, Chief...."

(He casts his vote with his wife and pulls out an envelope (containing money) and hands it to the electoral officer. The crowd is still buzzing "Chief, Chief". As he leaves, he brings out two bundles of money and sprays them in the air. There is pandemonium and stampede as the crowd struggle to pick the money. In the midst of this confusion, one of Nanga's thugs exchange the ballot box with the one they have brought. The voting comes to an abrupt end. The electoral officer and the police take the voting boxes away. After picking the money, the crowd begins to run around the stage singing)

CROWD: (singing)

Nanga, Nanga, Nanga k'anyi g'eso; / ma o n'eje-eje, ma o n'alo-alo, / Nanga k'anyi g'eso.

(Translation: 'Nanga, we shall follow; whether he goes, whether he comes, Nanga we shall follow').

Blackout

Act 4: Scene 2

Four youths in a game:

Street.

They run around in a circle three times singing 'We have recycled' with the chorus 'Ebebe ebebe' which means 'forever and ever'.

THE VILLAGERS:

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

1ST VILLAGER: We are a nation of recyclers.

2ND VILLAGER: Because no one who drank the old wine wants the new wine.

3RD VILLAGER: Because old wine is good.

4TH VILLAGER: It is well fermented.

1ST VILLAGER: With bees, flies and dregs!

THE VILLAGERS: *(all laugh)* Ha, ha, ha!

2ND VILLAGER: You better drink it or the bees will sting you. *(Laughter)*.

3RD VILLAGER: We'll keep drinking it until our throats begin to revolt.

(Together, they drink from their cups. The first Villager scratches his throat, looks at the second; the second scratches his throat, and then they scratch together. They sit on the ground, grab masks and put on).

4th VILLAGER: I heard that, the young man woke up on the Election Day and asked his father, “which day is the election”?
(laughter)

1st VILLAGER: The toddler that wears the father’s cloak will have the cloak blindfold him.
(laughter).

2nd VILLAGER: *(clears his voice and the other turns towards him with surprise looks)* I heard/

3rd VILLAGER: No, they said

4th VILLAGER: ...the young woman *(looks at the other to agree)*

3rd VILLAGERS: *(nod in agreement)* Yes, the young woman.

2nd VILLAGER: ...stayed with the young man in the hospital, all night.

1st, 3rd, 4th VILLAGERS: Uh-uh!

4th VILLAGER: They said...

2ND VILLAGER: Oh no, you heard.

1ST VILLAGER: They said, I heard.

3rd VILLAGER: Yes, drive forward.

1ST VILLAGER: ...the police were guarding the young man like a president/

2ND VILLAGER: No, like a prisoner until Nanga won the election.

3rd VILLAGER: Call him Chief.

4th VILLAGER: And Honourable...

1ST VILLAGER: ...yes, reappointed Minister!

ALL: *(shout and stand)* O yes, we have recycled! Ebebe ebebe!

We have recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

We have recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

We must recycle – Ebebe ebebe!

2nd VILLAGER: We are a nation of recyclers.

3rd VILLAGER: We bring back waste papers from stinking bins.

4th VILLAGER: I heard/

1st VILLAGER: Yes, you heard, because they said.

3rd VILLAGER: ...that the young man and his group are worried that Nanga/

2ND VILLAGER: Chief/

1ST VILLAGER: Honourable/

2ND VILLAGER: Reappointed Minister/

3rd VILLAGER:and his group have eaten so much/

4th VILLAGER: Let them eat. Did we commit suicide when the white man was eating alone?

1ST VILLAGER: No! He came, he ate, he went. But we the people (*they join hands*),

ALL: ...we the people...we are still here o o! (*They continue their recycling song and dance*). *We must recycle – Ebebe, ebebe!. As they leave they put on their masks one by one*).

Act 4: Scene 3

Samalu's sitting room

Light fades out on the Villagers on one side of the stage and fades in on Odili is sitting in front of the house on another side of the stage. He is wearing a T-shirt. He has bandage round his head and plasters on his face and hands.

Enter Joe, CPC member.

JOE: (*in a state of shock*) Odili!

ODILI: Joe.

JOE: (*gradually slumps on the seat beside Odili bending his head into his right hand. His eyes inspect Odili's body*). Thank God, you are alive. (*bends his head again and then up again*). Odili, (*Odili looks at him*) forgive me; I bring you bad news (*Pause*) Max is dead.

ODILI: (*freezes in his position for a while and then startles with a loud cry*) Oh no! (*Joe tries to control Odili*).

(*Mr Samalu enters from indoors*)

MR SAMALU: What is it? What is that, young man? Odili, what is it?

ODILI: (*in grief*) O Max...O Max

MR SAMALU: What? That young man?

JOE: Yes, sir. They killed him.

MR SAMALU: (*goes quiet folding his hands across his chest. pause*). Odili, you are not well: you must take it easy.

ODILI: Where is Eunice?

JOE: In police custody.

ODILI: Why? For what?

JOE: She shot Chief Koko and he died. (*Odili falls back on his seat, gazing at Joe to tell him more*). Max was investigating the rigging of ballot papers which was organised by Chief Koko's wife. Chief Koko's jeep knocked him down as he alighted from his car. Eunice, the girl with the heart of a man, grabbed a gun from her handbag and shot Chief Koko's on the chest.

ODILI: Oh, my God.

JOE: Even in that pandemonium, Eunice calmly went to the police station and turned herself in.

(Pause as Odili nods his head gently). Odili, I must be going. So many things to sort out. *(leaves).*

MR SAMALU: Such a brave young man. I remember that day he came to the hospital with a new nomination paper for you to sign.

ODILI: Nomination paper?

MR SAMALU: Remember I told you that that one you signed never reached the Electoral Officer? Max came by himself with a new nomination paper and the police turned him back?

ODILI: In the hospital?

MR SAMALU: Yes, in the hospital.

ODILI: Why?

MR SAMALU: *(shakes his head)* What do you remember? Tell me.

ODILI: I know my car is burnt.

MR SAMALU: Yes? Why?

ODILI: You said they found dangerous weapons in it.

MR SAMALU: Yes, that's the report we got – five machetes and two double-barrelled guns. Therefore, the police kept you under arrest at the hospital until the case was withdrawn. Do you remember now?

ODILI: It's okay *(scratches his head).*

MR SAMALU: Your friend, Max, before he left the hospital said to me: "Tell Odili, we shall win." *(Pause).* Poor boy! *(he shrugs and goes indoors).*

(Odili reclines back to his seat. Lights fade out on Odili and fades in on the Villagers who are dozing off in their sitting positions. The light fades in again on Odili).

Enter Edna. Odili and Edna remain silent looking at each other for a while.

ODILI: Congratulations! I will never contest his seat again. I am terribly sorry, Edna. I will always remember that in that entire crowd you were the only one who tried to help me. *(Tears in Edna's eyes).* Don't cry, please. Please, my love, don't. Come and sit here. *(Edna sits down but shifts a bit from him. Odili offers her handkerchief to wipe her tears but Edna uses her own. (Pause).* Please forgive me for all the bad things I have said to you.

EDNA: Forgive you for saying the truth?

ODILI: Oh please, Edna, don't talk like that. I know how you feel...just that I didn't want you to go and marry that beast.

EDNA: Marry him? Hm. *(Pause).* I never wanted to marry him. But, at least I thank God I am better than some people, with all their minister and everything.

Enter Mr Samalu.

EDNA: *(stands respectfully)* Good day, sir.

MR SAMALU: Ah, my daughter, you have stayed away for so long. I began to think I frightened you?

EDNA: No, sir.

ODILI: What do you mean, father?

MR SAMALU: I told her I was going to marry her for one of my sons that day she spent the whole night with us at the hospital.

ODILI: So it wasn't a dream?

MR SAMALU: You and your dreams. (*Samalu goes indoors*).

ODILI: (*squeezes Edna's hands*). Edna, let's talk about our future.

EDNA: What future?

ODILI: (*pause*) Edna, I want to marry you.

(*They stare at each other*).

Blackout.

Act 4: Scene 4

Villagers react to Military Coup.

Street.

Martial music. Chaos. The villagers are startled and confused. A villager runs in with the news.

1st WOMAN: Army don take over gor'ment!

2nd WOMAN: They don take Nanga dem into prison.

1st MAN: (*coming from the opposite direction*) Eeyi, they have finished eating

2nd WOMAN:...and drinking!

2nd MAN: (*mimes drinking*) But we are still drinking. (*Laughter*).

1st WOMAN: They say them go make the young man from Urua minister o.

1st MAN: Eh? You mean the young man will start eating?

2nd MAN: Gbam!

2ND WOMAN: Hurry! We must go to Urua to show our solidarity.

1st WOMAN: So that when he eats...

ALL: We too will eat...

(*They begin to sing as they leave*).

Act 4: Scene 5

Odili exhorts the People.

Samalu's Living Room.

(*Odili is sitting down with radio by the side playing martial music. Mr Samalu is standing on the side of the radio. There is air of misbelief and excitement*).

ODILI: But do you think this is good news? The army?

MR SAMALU: Well, for now it is good that the thieves are chased away. Let us watch and see what the strong man does after chasing away the robbers.

ODILI: Ha! Will they be any better. They also come, claiming to right the wrongs, but do not.

MR. SAMALU: Like the politicians, the army too says one thing and does another. The difference is the uniform. A different kind of mask.

ODILI: I blame the people for this: they chose to vote in corrupt men.

SAMALU: We didn't vote for them. They took the power.

ODILI: Why didn't the people revolt? Why couldn't the people rise against the corrupt leaders as the village people of Anata did against Josiah the shopkeeper?

MR SAMALU: The village has a mind and could say no to sacrilege; not the nation, it belongs to nobody. Nobody wants to die. So, we can only follow those on top.

VILLAGERS: *(The people are heard offstage singing)*

Odili, Odili, Odili k'anyi ga-eso,
ma o na eje-eje ma o na alo-alo,
Odili k'anyi ga-eso'

(which means 'It's Odili we shall follow; whether he's going, whether he's coming, It's Odili we shall follow').

MR SAMALU: The people are coming to congratulate you. Why not go and put on your shirt?

ODILI: *(slightly furious)* No! Let them see my wounds! It is their hypocrisy; their failure to unite against evil; their failure to fight for what is right. And now, they rejoice that the bullets have come to reign over them. Tell them to go and recover the power which belongs to them!

MR SAMALU: The poor people are helpless, my son. They are innocent victims of divide and rule.

(The people come on stage singing)

ODILI: *(Interrupts the singing immediately)*. Poor innocent victims of divide and rule! Welcome! You take bribes to cast your votes for corrupt men. Yet, you are poor and innocent. You are victims of divide and rule. When you allow yourselves to be divided, I ask you: are you not as much evil as they that divide you?

(He looks around as though he expects the people to respond).

Are you not?! Why do you jump like grasshoppers from one forest to another, adoring trees that rise above the forests and obstruct sunlight to the rest? There is only one salvation tree for you. To this tree only should you sing to follow. Not Nanga, Koko or the Military Dictator. It is not to Odili that you should sing to follow: Follow your collective and undivided will. ONE MIND!

(Immediately, the big wooden gong, the bass drum and Udu, the musical pot, all sound once at the same time as the people walk away dejected. Light goes off with the sound).

Epilogue

They put on masks and execute the Dance sequence on

“We all wear masks... even the downtrodden”

The End.